

BEST AMERICAN MYSTERY STORIES

Selected and with an Introduction by
CAROLYN WELLS

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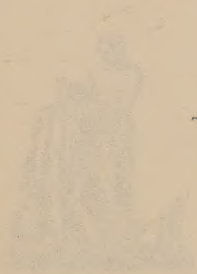
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BEST AMERICAN
MYSTERY STORIES



EDITED BY CHARLES BONI



B O N I B O O K S



BEST AMERICAN MYSTERY STORIES

I

Selected and with an Introduction by

CAROLYN WELLS



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The Best American Stories of the Year

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INTRODUCTION*

WHAT makes for worthwhileness in mystery fiction of any kind is the puzzle and its answer—not the gruesomeness of a setting or the personality of a hero or the delineation of a character.

A liking for mystery fiction is not a mark of poor taste or an indication of inferior intellect. Its readers form an audience greatly misunderstood by other literary people whose mentality lacks this bent. But what especial audience is not misunderstood? Do not many people say to music lovers, "I don't see how you can sit through *Parsifal*?" Do not some scoff at people who trail through art galleries, catalogue in hand?

Let us concede that a taste for mystery fiction is not universal. We will even admit that in its nicer points the riddle story may be "caviare to the general," but we will not agree that it is unworthy a place in literature or that it is outside the pale of art.

Much is being said just now about a change in the fashion of Detective Stories. Many people like to read of the gangsters and their slang rather than the analytical detective and his brain work.

This is merely a matter of taste, therefore cannot be disputed. But writers capable of limning an inspired, intuitive, brilliantly logical super-sleuth are still doing so. But it requires inspiration to do this. The plodding, hard-working, routine investigator is easier to draw and so is used as a makeshift, or, at least as an alternative device. The outstanding successes of the last few years almost all

* Part of this Introduction was taken from my newly revised "The Technique of the Mystery Story."—C. W.

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show some variant of the Sherlock Holmes type, or if a plodding official, then one already giving promise of a budding genius in his line.

Fashions change in detective stories only in so far as the fashion of human life changes, and that means superficially. The main plot of a detective story, like the main theme of a love story, is ever the same in scope, however it may change in details or manner of treatment. But such matters are merely relative and so long as mankind retains a curiosity complex, so long will the Detective Story show the Crime and its Solution as a chief proposition.

But, while it is customary to-day for writers discussing detective fiction to harp upon the great changes made by the passing of the years and the wide difference between the mystery tale of this year and that of twenty or thirty years ago, yet a true consideration of this matter quickly shows that the changes and differences are superficial and are brought about by the march of progress, the broader knowledge of authors and the quicker perceptions of readers. The fashion of the presentment changes, as do the styles in the shop windows, but the detective story itself has never wavered from its original formula, the Crime and its Solution.

To trace the origin and history of the mystery story is simply to trace the origin and history of man's mind. Mystery stories were told and wonder tales invented before the days of old Rameses, before the Sphinx was hewn or Samson born. And indeed the rousing of latent curiosity, the tempting with a promise to divulge, which is the vital principle of the mystery story, began no later than with the subtlety of the Primal Serpent.

There is no country which has not its quota of traditional and folk-lore tales, founded almost invariably on

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some element of mystery, surprise or suspense. And why? Because the interest of the eternal audience is "gripped" by a desire to know the unknown. Because the ancients told and retold stories of mystery with never failing success. These tales lived. Translated, re-written, paraphrased, they are still living, because of their ever new appeal to the very human trait of curiosity.

Take the story of "The Clever Thief." It comes from the Tibetan, from an ancient Buddhist book that goes back nearly a thousand years. But even then it was not new. Missionaries had carried it thither from India in an odd corner of their bags, or in some chamber of the memory not filled with the riddles of being. Where did they get it? Who can say? It was old when Herodotus wandered through sun-lit Egypt twenty-four centuries ago, gleaning tales from the priests of Amen and of Ptah. He tells it, point for point, as did those Buddhist missionaries, but lays it in the days of Rameses, nigh four thousand years ago. Everything is there; the cutting off of the head to elude detection, the tricks by which the relatives mourn over the headless trunk, the snare set for the thief and his outwitting it. And that same tale, like good merchandise, was carried both east and west. It found its way to India, over the vast Himalayas, to the gray roof of the world. It came with equal charm to the Mediterranean isles, up the Adriatic coasts, and as far as Venice. There Ser Giovanni told it, transmogrifying Pharaoh of the Nile into a worshipful Doge, as he had already been made over into a Buddhist magnate, but in no way altering the motive, the suspense, the artfulness of the tale. What is this story then? Is it Venetian? Is it Pharaonic? Is it Greek? Is it Tibetan? It is all these, and perhaps something more, vastly older than them all. Its craft, mayhap, goes back to that primal serpent who,

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more subtle than all the beasts of the field, has ever inspired darkling feints and strategies.

Stories whose motive is a subtly discerned clew are not less primordial. The most vivid of these tales of deduction are, perhaps, those which come to us through the Arabs, in their treasure store, "The Thousand and One Nights." The Arabs gleaned them from every land in southern Asia, and from most ancient Egypt, in those days when Moslem power overshadowed half the world. And then they retold them with a charm, a vivid freshness, a roguishness, and a dash of golden light through it all that make them the finest story-tellers in the world.

Can we fix the dates of these Arabian stories? Only in a general way. Some of them came from Cairo, some from Syria, some from the Euphrates and Tigris Valleys, some from Persia and India and China; and they were gathered together, it would appear, in the century before Shakespeare was born, by some big-hearted, humorous fellow, among the great anonymous benefactors of mankind. But he made no claim of inventing them. If he had he would have been laughed at for his pains. For old men had heard them from their grandfathers, generation after generation, and the gray grandsires always began to tell them, saying: "So 'twas told to me when I was such a tiny child as thou art."

Though many of these tales excite merely wonder and surprise, others have the germ of that analytic deduction from inconspicuous clews, that we call ratiocination, or the detective instinct.

There is an Arabic story, called "The Sultan and His Three Sons" which employs the principle of deductive analysis.

Later Voltaire used this method for his "Zadig," Poe for his "Dupin," and Gaboriau for his "M. Lecoq";

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while later still it reappeared as the basis of the "Sherlock Holmes" stories.

The class of fiction which we group under the head of Detective Stories, must include all stories where the problem is invented and solved by the author and set forth in such a way as to give an astute reader opportunities for guessing or reasoning out the answer.

An actual detective need not necessarily figure in the story, but detective work must be done by some of the characters.

There must be crime or apparent crime or attempted crime. But whether the problem is one of murder, robbery or kidnaping,—whether it be solved by evidence, deduction or a cryptogram,—it is detected, not guessed, and this is the main element in our classification.

The average or typical Detective Story of to-day is the detailed narrative of the proceedings of an individual of unusual mental acumen in unraveling a mystery.

Strictly speaking, a detective is a member of the police organization or of a private detective agency. But for fictional purposes he may be such, or he may be any one with what is called "detective instinct" or a taste for detective work.

It appears that in its earliest days the word "detective" meant merely a shadower or follower.

The Detective Story as we know it was first written by Poe, yet he never used the descriptive word, nor was Dupin a detective, either professional or amateur, for when Poe wrote his immortal Dupin tales, the name "Detective" Stories had not been invented; the detective of fiction not having been as yet discovered. And the title is still something of a misnomer, for many narratives involving a puzzle of some sort, are handled by the writer without expert detective aid. Sometimes the puzzle

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solves itself through operation of circumstance; sometimes somebody who professes no special detective skill happens upon the secret of its mystery; once in a while some venturesome genius has the courage to leave his enigma unexplained. But ever since Gaboriau created his Lecoq, the *transcendent detective* has been in favor; and Conan Doyle's famous gentleman analyst has given him a fresh lease of life, and reanimated the stage by reverting to the method of Poe. Sherlock Holmes is Dupin *redivivus*, and *mutatus mutandis*; personally he is a more stirring and engaging companion, but so far as kinship to probabilities or even possibilities is concerned, perhaps the older version of him is the more presentable. But in this age of marvels we seem less difficult to suit in this respect than our forefathers were.

The fact is, meanwhile, that, in the Riddle Story, the detective was an afterthought, or, more accurately, a *deus ex machina* to make the story go. The riddle had to be unriddled; and who could do it so naturally and readily as a detective? The detective, as Poe saw him, was a means to this end; and it was only afterwards that writers perceived his availability as a character. Lecoq accordingly becomes a figure in fiction, and Sherlock, while he was yet a novelty, was nearly as attractive as the complications in which he involved himself.

Detective Story writers in general, however, encounter the obvious embarrassment that their detective is obliged to lavish so much attention on the professional services which the exigencies of the tale demand of him, that he has very little leisure to attend to his own personal equation—the rather since the attitude of peering into a millstone is not, of itself, conducive to elucidations of oneself; the professional endowment obscures all the others. We ordinarily find, therefore, our author dis-

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missing the individuality of his detective with a few strong black-chalk outlines, and devoting his main labor upon what he feels the reader will chiefly occupy his own ingenuity with,—namely, the elaboration of the riddle itself. Reader and writer sit down to a game, as it were, with the odds, of course, altogether on the latter's side,—apart from the fact that a writer sometimes permits himself a little cheating. It more often happens that the detective appears to be in the writer's pay, and aids the deception by leading the reader off on false scents. Be that as it may, the professional sleuth is in nine cases out of ten a dummy by malice prepense; and it might be plausibly argued that, in the interest of pure art, that is what he ought to be. But genius always finds a way that is better than the rules, and it will be found that the very best riddle stories contrive to drive character and riddle side by side, and to make each somehow enhance the effect of the other.

The intention of the above paragraph will be more precisely conveyed if we include under the name of detective not only the man from the central office, but also anybody whom the writer may, for ends of his own, consider better qualified for that function. The latter is a professional detective so far as the exigencies of the tale are concerned, and what becomes of him after that, nobody need care,—there is no longer anything to prevent his becoming, in his own right, the most fascinating of mankind.

Before Poe's or Gaboriau's stories, appeared the "Memoirs of Vidocq." This work, thought by many to be largely fiction, is the history of a clever villain who became a detective, though never called by that name. He was a Secret Agent, and is called on his own title page, Principal Agent of the French Police. His memoirs

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are old-fashioned, dull and uninteresting, but they show glimmerings of the kind of reasoning that later marked the Fiction Detective.

Perhaps Gaboriau was the first author to use the terminology, since become so familiar, of detective, clues, deduction, etc.

Poe ascribed to his Dupin, "analytic ability," and this is all that is claimed for the conventional detective of fiction, though perhaps more acutely described by Brander Matthews as "imaginative ratiocination."

Poe goes further in saying Dupin's work was "The result of an excited or perhaps a diseased intelligence." This statement may have mirrored the author's own mind, for, while making no assertion, Professor Matthews observes that he should understand any one who might declare that Poe had mental disease raised to the *n*th power, and we have long since been told that "great wits are sure to madness near allied."

But it is this very principle that marks the difference between the detective in fiction and in real life. The cleverest detectives in life are not men of diseased intellect, however greatly developed may be their powers of ratiocination. It is just that touch of abnormality, of superhuman reasoning, that makes a Transcendent Detective.

Again, the work of the fiction detective is always successful. Naturally, because his work is planned to this end by the author. The fiction detective plays his game with marked cards. Though seemingly groping in the dark, he is walking a definite path laid straight to a definite end. He is pushed off on false scents, but pulled back and set right again by an adjusting power which does not exist in the case of real detectives.

Indeed, the sooner the writer of detective fiction real-

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izes that the detective of fiction has little in common with the detective in real life, the better is that author equipped for his work.

The real detective, for one thing, is rarely a man of culture or high ideals. The fiction detective is usually an aristocrat, unfortunately impoverished, or working at his art for art's sake.

The real detective, however great his analytic ability, often finds that he cannot apply it to his case. The fiction detective never has this experience; he finds his case ready made and perfectly fitted to his powers.

The real detective finds little or nothing in the way of useful material clues. The fiction detective finds his properties laid ready to his hand at the right moment. Dropped handkerchiefs, shreds of clothing, broken cuff-links, torn letters,—all are sprinkled in the path ahead of him, like roses strewn before a bride.

Even Nature lends a helping hand to the favored detective of fiction. Usually "A light snow had fallen the evening before." This snow is declared by credible witnesses to have begun at one psychological moment, and stopped at another; thus allowing the inevitable display of footprints of certain sizes, shapes and superimposition. Indeed the laws of nature are willing to give way, at need, and vegetation takes on unusual qualities to help along the good work. Sherlock Holmes continually finds his indicative footprints on turf or grass plot, and of course the criminal is identified at once.

But the real detective seldom if ever finds these helpful footprints at the right time and place. In case of his need of them, the obstinate ground is hard and unimpressionable; or the snow is melting and shows only oblong holes; or the grass refuses to present a clear and definite impression; or even if fairly respectable muddy

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footprints appear on a nice, clean, hardwood floor, they are so incomplete in outline that they might have been made by any well-advertised shoe.

The criminals and suspects in fiction must presumably wear shoes made for the purpose, with flat level soles that touch the floor at all points and leave an exact working diagram, instead of a shapeless blotch with ragged edges.

Similarly with fingerprints. Though carefully impressed in incriminating places by the fiction criminals, in real life they are rarely found where they can be of use. The fingerprints found on the discarded empty frame of the *Mona Lisa* did not lead to the recovery of the picture; whereas in fiction they would have put the thief at once behind bars.

No, the fiction detective is not a real person any more than the fairy godmother is a real person; but both are honored and popular celebrities in the realm of fiction.

It is safe to say that Poe's conception of the interest-element in the Detective Story, as illustrated by his three great tales, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Purloined Letter," and "The Mystery of Marie Roget," was that the great point was not the fascination of the mystery itself but the interest the reader would take in following the successive steps of reasoning by which the crime was ferreted out. The reader is thus turned into an analytical observer who not only delights in the mental ingenuity exhibited by the detective, but actually joins with him in working out the intricacies of a problem which, though at first seemingly insoluble, is at length mastered entirely. Thus his admiration for the "investigator" is happily coupled with his own delight in unraveling the skein which the author has woven ex-

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pressly for the purpose, as Poe himself expresses it when he admits all the merits of the device, but modestly disclaims that his ingenious stories have real greatness. He speaks thus about them:

“They owe most of their popularity to being something in a new key. I do not mean to say that they are not ingenious—but people think them more ingenious than they are—on account of their method and air of method. In the ‘Murders in the Rue Morgue,’ for instance, where is the ingenuity of unraveling a web which you yourself (the author) have woven for the express purpose of unraveling? The reader is made to confound the ingenuity of the supposititious Dupin with that of the writer of the story.”

Of course the ingenuity of the author and that of his character are identical, as they are in the case of Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes.

The interest of the Detective Story depends entirely on its rousing the reader’s curiosity. Every detail of its plan must sustain and heighten an intense determination to know the solution of the riddle; and as this curiosity becomes keener, and this determination more inflexible, so much more necessary is it that the explanation shall be adequate and satisfactory.

To sum up, then, we must agree that for devotees the Detective Story sets a stirring mental exercise, with just enough of the complex background of life to distinguish it from a problem in mathematics. Whatever thrills of horror are excited come by way of the intellect, never starting directly in the emotions. The reader divests himself of sympathy, and applies to every situation the dry light of reason.

This volume being the first of what is planned as an annual publication, a slight indulgence has been allowed

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and a few stories are included that appeared in recent magazines dated before 1930. Hereafter, however, the year's limits will be strictly observed.

An annual collection of English short Detective stories is published on both sides of the Atlantic. We like to feel that the writers of America compare favorably with our British contemporaries, but with advent of Conan Doyle, the English fiction writers fell into a stride with which it is not easy to keep pace. However, we are justified in feeling proud of the list of contents in this anthology and hope for even greater things in the future.

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MAN AFRAID

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SIMON GARY, by the unanimous opinion of those who knew him best, was an arrant coward; yet this was not altogether surprising. To train a fighting dog, you pit him first against opponents he can surely master; but Simon had fought since babyhood a series of losing battles. Thus in the matter of his profession, he was a drug clerk from choice; but it was his father's choice, not his own. The elder Gary was a snuffy old man with bristling brows; and he had held Simon in a filial terror for so many years that it never occurred to the boy to be anything but what his father wanted. His father wanted an assistant in the pharmacy, so a drug clerk Simon did become.

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He was afraid of his father, and he was afraid of many other things. He was afraid of policemen, of automobiles, of indigestion; he was even afraid of caterpillars and of butterflies. Most of all, perhaps, he was afraid of his wife. When he found himself, in some fashion wholly mysterious, committed to marry Alice Field, he thought that marriage would at least remove him from his father's roof, give him some small empire of his own. But he was to find that he had simply bowed the knee before another tyrant. Alice was pretty and soft and helpless to the eye; but she had iron in her, and Simon was wax in her hands.

To be afraid of one we hate is bad enough; but it is infinitely worse to live in daily fear of one beloved. Simon devoted his every waking thought to the effort to avoid doing anything by which Alice might be displeased; yet he was not always successful. If smoking in the house scented her curtains, he could give it up; if she liked to read the morning paper as it came fresh-folded from the presses, he could surrender it to her intact; if she wished to lie late abed in the morning, he could prepare her breakfast and bring it on a tray. He learned to walk softly so that he would not wear holes in his socks. He learned to press his own neckties. He learned to put on overalls before tending the furnace, lest he soil his more formal clothes.

But three times during the first months of their marriage he committed, despite his best precautions, the unpardonable sin. He missed the last train home from town.

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The first time he came home by street car, arriving half an hour or more after Alice had expected him, she gave him a chance to explain; but this was difficult, because she began with the assumption that whatever he said was a lie. After his explanations she refused to speak to him for twenty-four hours. The second time he came home late, she wept aloud all night in the bed beside him, sobbing that he had betrayed her for another woman. The third time she went home to her mother for three interminable days; and when she returned, she told him sadly that if he were ever late again, she would kill herself.

"Because I don't want to live, Simon, dear," she wistfully explained, "if I'm once convinced you don't love me any more."

A bolder man would have told her to stop being an idiot; but Simon was not bold. He was afraid of scores of things, though, of course, he was more afraid of some things than of others. He vowed never to be late again; but there was one occasion when in the effort to keep this vow he displayed an extraordinary energy, and a reckless audacity not to be expected of a man afraid.

The drug store was a small establishment, narrow and compact, tucked away in the crevice between a shoe-shine parlor and a fruit counter, just across the street from the South Station. Simon and his father were its only staff; and this meant long hours. Three days in the week Simon came in at eight and stayed till six at night, catching the six-

seven train in time to be home for dinner at six-forty-five. On the other days he reported for duty at noon and stayed till eleven at night, arriving home by the train which was due in Newtonville at eleven-forty-two. The routine was absolute, and Simon clung to it tenaciously.

On the occasion about to be related, the elder Gary went home at six and left Simon in sole charge. It was a winter night; a blizzard howled through the street under the Elevated. Snow packed in the window corners, and frosted the windowpanes and banked against the door. The street lamps shone through a nimbus of light reflected from the swirling flakes. But the drug store was warm and comfortable; and Simon had no worry except a fear that his train might be late in getting home. Sometimes on such a night the switches froze.

Business in the little pharmacy was never brisk; and to-night it was even more dull than usual. Simon had time on his hands; and when his father had gone, he sat on a tall stool behind the glass screen which shielded the prescription department, and began to read the evening paper.

He was invisible behind the screen, so that from the street the store appeared to be empty. But Simon could see, through a transparent panel in the glass, anyone who might enter; and about twenty minutes after his father departed, two men came in. They were muffled against the storm, their faces invisible. They came in and closed the door behind them and stood looking out through

the snow-crusted glass into the street, as though watching someone there.

Simon noticed that they carried bags: two suitcases and one soft black leather kit of smaller size. He thought this faintly surprising; because if they were about to take a train at the station across the street, they might as well have gone direct to that shelter from the storm.

But he descended from his stool and came around the screen into the front of the store to serve them. The men turned at his appearance, in a faintly startled fashion, and one of them dove quickly into the telephone booth. Simon thought the other had had a like impulse; but the first man closed the door of the booth behind him, leaving his companion outside; and this man, after a moment's hesitation, said:

"Hot chocolate!"

Simon prepared the drink. The man in the booth seemed to be telephoning, for the low murmur of his voice could be heard through the muffling walls. He who had ordered the hot chocolate sipped it slowly, watching the man in the booth, watching the street; and Simon studied him curiously. Till by and by the customer seemed to become conscious of Simon's regard, and to be by it disquieted. He fumbled in his pocket and produced a bank note.

"Here," he said, and laid it on the marble slab.

Simon noticed that the man kept his head bent so that the brim of his hat shadowed his countenance; he was still wondering why the other did this

as he picked up the money and turned and pressed the key of the cash register to register the sale. But, as the drawer slid open, Simon looked for the first time at that which he held in his hand, and saw that it was a fifty-dollar bill!

Now the elder Gary had taken most of the day's cash with him. Simon hesitated, then turned to his customer.

"Haven't you anything smaller?" he asked.

"Smallest I've got," the other retorted.

"I can't change it," Simon confessed.

"Well, go get the change," the customer directed, in a quick impatience.

Simon still hesitated; he pointed toward the man in the booth. "How about him?"

"He can't change it either," the other insisted.

And Simon stood shifting from one foot to the other, suddenly a little pale. He was on the horns of a dilemma. There were two rules which the elder Gary held absolute. Never leave a customer alone in the store; and never let the cash register get out of balance. The sale was already registered, or Simon would have forgiven his customer the price of the hot chocolate. He might have done so even now, and made good the deficit out of his own pocket; but Alice required him to keep a punctilious account of his expenditures, and she would miss the nickel. Simon was more afraid of her displeasure than of his father's; and the end was that he went behind the screen and put on his overcoat and hat, and came out again.

"I'll be right back," he promised. The customer

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made no reply; and Simon went out into the storm.

He hurried, because he was uneasy at having left the store alone. Yet the first shop he tried, and the second, declined to accommodate him. It must have been almost ten minutes before he returned with the change. As he came in sight of the pharmacy, he thought he saw his two customers crossing toward the station through the swirling snow. But he decided this must be a mistake, and he went on to the store.

It was empty. The men were gone.

They must have been compelled to catch a train, Simon decided; and he remembered that there was a six-thirty express west. Trains were a hobby with Simon; he took long journeys in time-tables. Some day, when he could afford it, he meant to follow the routes he traced on paper now; but for the present his travels were purely literary. Yet he knew the time card backward; and he was quite sure in his own mind now where the men had gone.

It did not occur to him to keep the money. He had once short-changed his father, retaining three pennies out of a nickel with which he had been sent to buy papers. This was fifteen years ago; but Simon still remembered very vividly the penalties of theft. So he sprang the lock on the door and ran across the street toward the station. He could catch the two men before the train pulled out, give them their money, and be back in five minutes' time. He ran across the street into the station; and he raced the length of the train shed to the track from which the six-thirty would depart.

He came thus far without having overtaken the men he sought; but he cut through a nearer gate and ran along the length of the train, watching through the windows till in one of the forward cars, near the engine, he discovered them, moving down the aisle.

He climbed the steps, panting with haste, the money clutched in his hand. The train began to move; and he hesitated; but he could always alight at Trinity Place and return. So he went on.

The men were not in sight in the car, and for a moment he was baffled. Then he realized that they must be in the drawing-room; and he tried the door. It was locked; but he knocked; and after a moment the door opened a crack, and a man looked out. Simon said hurriedly:

"You forgot your money!"

Someone inside swore, in a tone of surprise and dismay. The man at the door hesitated, and half closed the door; but Simon was in haste. He must be ready to get off the train at Trinity Place, and they were already rolling through the yards. He pushed the door open and stumbled in, the money in his hand.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed.

The men seemed at a loss. One of them closed the door, and bolted it; but Simon did not notice this. He was not sure for the moment to which one the change was due; and he looked from one to the other searchingly. They were curiously alike, somewhere in their thirties, with alarming eyes.

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Then the man at the door said: "Pull down the shades!"

The other reached across and did so. Simon tried to protest; and then he choked, and swallowed hard.

For the man behind him jabbed Simon in the ribs with something, and Simon looked down and saw it was a gun. The man said grimly:

"Sit down!"

Simon sat down. He was a jelly of fear.

Simon did not leave the train at Trinity Place. His first frantic appeals had been silenced by the steady menace of that pistol; and he sat trembling while the train stopped and started again. When they were once more under way he listened in horror while his captors devised a working arrangement to meet the situation into which Simon's coming had precipitated them.

They had made Simon sit next the window. Then the younger man put on a black silk scarf like a sling, and rested his right hand in this scarf. The pistol was in this hand, concealed by the black folds. He sat down beside Simon and the pistol pointed across the front of his body at the terrified young man.

When the conductors came to take up the tickets, Simon stared straight ahead, and the young man with his arm in a sling sat beside him, while the other man dealt with the train officials. They had only two tickets, he explained cheerfully; but his friend here—he nodded toward Simon—had de-

cided at the last moment to come along. He paid a cash fare to Chicago with another fifty-dollar bill. The conductors withdrew and the man bolted the door again.

Then he sat down, facing Simon, and he looked at Simon intently. He was not a pleasant man. There was a mustache like a black smudge across his upper lip, and Simon did not like mustaches. This man asked Simon harshly:

"Now, what's the game?"

"I brought back your change," Simon stammered. "That's all." The money was still in his hand, and he extended it toward his questioner.

The other ignored the money. His lip twisted. "Come clean!" he directed. "Come clean!"

"Eh?" Simon protested.

"I said, what's the game?"

"Why, you gave me a fifty-dollar bill," Simon urged. "And I——"

"Not me," Black Mustache corrected scornfully. "I didn't give it to you. It was that simp there!"

The younger man by Simon's side said mildly: "Whose idea was it, ducking in the drug store, anyway? He was sizing me up! I had to get him out of the way."

"I brought back your money," Simon said again.

"Just an honest man, eh?" Black Mustache asked derisively.

"Why, yes," Simon pleaded. "Yes, that's all!"

"I think you're a liar," said the older man vividly. "Who knows you came?"

"Nobody," said Simon.

"Now isn't that too bad!" Black Mustache commented; and he grinned. "Now isn't that too bad!"

And Simon shivered at that grin.

But the younger man, there by Simon's side, shook his head. "No, Ed," he remarked. "I've gone this far with you. We've got the stuff." His eyes rested on the soft leather bag under the other's hand. "But I don't stand for anything else. I don't want to burn."

"I'll burn before I rot in jail," said Black Mustache.

Before the other could reply, the train slowed for Newtonville; and Simon started to his feet. But the mild young man beside him—and he did not in this moment seem so mild—said softly:

"Sit down, buddy. I don't want to hurt you; but I don't mind if I do."

Simon stood shuddering like a frightened horse. He had been till now so full of terror that he could not think. But when the train stopped at this familiar station he had remembered Alice. She might telephone the drug store during the evening. Certainly she would expect him home on the eleven-forty-two. He had to be there, dared not fail.

But the gun jabbed him in the ribs, and he sat down; stayed silent while the train was at a standstill, waited till it went on once more.

Then he said pleadingly: "I've got to go back. There's no one in the store. And I've got to get home by midnight."

"Why?" asked Black Mustache.

"My wife will worry!" said Simon desperately. He became voluble. "You see, she's always afraid I'll run after other women. I wouldn't. There aren't any other women but her. But she thinks that, so I have to be careful all the——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Black Mustache. He looked toward his ally. "Listen," he urged intently. "We're all right so far. They won't find out a thing about it at the bank till to-morrow morning. We've got that much start. But this sap crabs the show. He's seen us; he can spill the works. I say, curtains for him!"

"I've got to get home," Simon cried. He was thinking in terms of time-tables. "Listen, I'll get off at Worcester and catch the eight-four back."

"Say," Black Mustache assured him malignantly, "you won't catch no train at Worcester, fellow!"

And the younger man amended this. "The best break you can get, buddy, is to wake up in Chicago to-morrow," he told Simon. "Now keep still."

His tone was calm; it was almost friendly. Yet Simon found it had a curiously chilling quality. He sat still; but time-tables came tumbling through his distracted head.

"We've got to let the porter make up the berths," the younger man pointed out. "That's the first thing." He rang, and when the porter presently appeared, this young man held Simon with his eyes, while Black Mustache said briefly:

"Fix us up as soon as you can, porter."

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"Yes, sir," the porter agreed. "Upper and couch, sir?"

Black Mustache nodded.

"I'll take care of you right away," the porter promised.

He departed to fetch linen, and Black Mustache asked, with a nod toward Simon:

"What'll we do with him while the porter's in here? Take him in the smoking compartment?"

"Yes," said the mild young man. He looked at Simon. "But you won't talk much, buddy. You won't talk at all. Because my arm's still broke, see."

And he showed Simon the gun, in the black silk sling.

"I just want to get off and go home," said Simon helplessly.

But the porter returned; and he dared speak no more.

They had the smoking compartment to themselves; they returned by and by to find the drawing-room prepared for their occupancy. Black Mustache locked the door; and he said to the mild young man:

"All right, they won't bother us till morning now."

"We'll be in Worcester in ten minutes," Simon pleaded.

Black Mustache ignored him. "I say we finish him, and drop off somewhere and beat it."

The younger man ran his hands over Simon's

pockets. "He isn't heeled!" he said then; and to Simon: "Get up there!"

So Simon climbed into the upper berth; and he thought of Alice, and his brow was wet. He began desperately to seek some device by which he could escape. If he submitted to the will of these two deadly men he might come to Chicago alive; to resist was likely to have serious consequences. But even if he survived, Alice would never believe the fantastic story he must tell; so his thoughts went racing.

There was a penknife in his pocket. A drowning man snatches at straws. Simon opened the tiny blade and hid the knife under his pillow. If the worst happened, it might serve some useful end.

On the couch below him, the men discussed his fate. Black Mustache still favored simple murder; but the mild young man overruled him.

"Here's what we'll do," he said at last positively. "I won't stand for anything else."

"You've got one vote," Black Mustache grimly reminded him.

"And one gun," said the younger man in the gentlest tones. "And I'm that much ahead of you. I say—here's what we'll do."

This was his plan. They would tie Simon securely, with a towel to close his mouth. They themselves would alight at Albany, leaving Simon gagged and bound in the upper berth. And the porter would be instructed that Simon was not to be waked in the morning.

"That way," the younger man pointed out,

"they won't find him till they hit Chicago, and we'll have time enough to get across the line, the way we planned. Jim will be at the station in Albany with the car. And that's that!"

"Let's take him with us," Black Mustache urged. "Take him for a ride. We can throw him off a bridge some place."

"I've told you what we'll do," the other reminded him. "Of course, if he makes a break, that's different. But as long as he behaves, that's good enough!"

And with a warning glance at Simon, he opened the door and called the porter in.

"This gentleman and I have had to change our plans," he explained, indicating Black Mustache. "We're getting off at Albany. But Mr. Jones—" he nodded toward Simon, lying very still in the upper berth—"Mr. Jones is going on to Chicago." He spoke to Simon directly. "You want to sleep late in the morning, don't you, Jones? Don't want to be waked, do you?"

"No," said Simon huskily. "Let me sleep. Late as I can."

"Yes, sir," the porter agreed.

When they were again alone, the younger man spoke to Simon.

"Now let's have your hat, and coat, and pants," he directed briefly.

Simon sat up in the berth and took them off as he was bid. "Hang the overcoat up," he begged. "And the coat too. Alice doesn't like it if my clothes are mussed."

"Why, we're pleased to oblige," the young man assented with a smile. He draped the coats over the hanger by the door; and as Simon kicked off his shoes and drew off his trousers, the young man thrust the shoes under the edge of the couch, folded the trousers and put them in the baggage rack. But before he did so, he removed the belt from its loops.

"Now," he directed, "stick your feet out here."

Simon looked at the watch on his wrist. The train was slowing down for Worcester. He shuddered; but there might still be time to get back from Springfield. He must get back; he dared not fail.

He was thinking about trains and time-tables while the young man bound his ankles together with the belt, and strapped them firmly. At the other's direction he rolled on his side and offered his wrists to be secured. His captor climbed half into the berth to affix the towel that would serve as a gag; and Simon bit hard on the rough fabric forced between his teeth.

"There," said the young man, when his arrangements were complete. "You're getting a break! Call yourself lucky, and be a nice boy."

He even pulled up the blankets and tucked Simon snugly in. Then he and Black Mustache sat down on the couch below, and stayed there in low-voiced conversation while the train stopped at Worcester and went on.

Simon, lying on his side in the upper berth so that he could look down on them where they sat,

was in the grip of a horrible despair. His bonds were tight, the towel muffled his mouth and hindered his breathing, and his posture was incredibly awkward and uncomfortable; but he was unconscious of his pains. His thoughts were misery enough. He might not get home for days; his father would discover that the store had gone untended, and Alice—he dared not think what Alice would do. He lay in a dismal grief, curled into a ball like a puppy which is cold in its sleep; and below him the two men talked calmly of black and hideous things.

The trussed captive in the upper berth heard without attending to their words some of the things they said. They were, he gathered, trusted employees of one of the Boston banks who had served loyally for years, waiting the right and proper moment for the coup just consummated. Now the thing was done, their escape accomplished, their prospective flight assured; and there was enough in the soft black bag to make them rich for years.

So much Simon understood, but he did not greatly care. He would have given all the money in the little bag to be safe back in the store.

That which at last turned his thoughts in a more practical direction was a little thing. He lay on his right side, his hands behind him; and he moved his arms now and then to ease the pain of their cramped position. Once when he did this, his hands escaped from under the edge of the blanket and touched the steel plate that formed the side of the berth and at the same time the side of the car. The

steel was cool and soothing to the touch; Simon stroked it absently.

And his fingers came in contact with a projection there.

He felt it gingerly, recognized its nature. It was a bell button; to press it would no doubt summon the porter. So long as he could reach the bell he was not wholly lost. And he took quick hope, and began, with a sudden lucidity, to plan and to devise.

He forgot to be afraid, in this new activity. The bell would summon the porter; even with his bound hands, he could press the button. But the porter could do nothing for him now. He must first help himself; and he could do so much more if he were free. He wrenched at his bonds, tentatively; but his thoughts were searching. And suddenly they found something.

His thoughts found the knife under his pillow.

He lay quite still, considering the possibilities, staring blankly. He turned over, so that his captors might not see his face and guess his thoughts; and he thus lay facing the blank wall of the berth, where hung the hammock designed to contain a traveler's clothes. His fingers had found the bell button; his thoughts had found the knife; his eyes found the hammock!

And in a moment Simon's plan was formed.

The first step to its accomplishment was to secure the knife. It was under the pillow, here beneath his head, not three inches from his ear; yet it seemed at first very far away. Moving gingerly

lest he alarm the men who sat just below him, he tried to lift his cramped hands far enough to reach the knife; but the effort was a hopeless one. He resorted to indirection. He burrowed with his head under the pillow, found the knife with his chin, dragged it downward toward his chest, pushed it farther down.

This took time; but the men were not alarmed. When Simon was sure of this, he turned over on his other side, his bound hands behind him; and instantly his fingers touch the smooth pearl handle of the pen-knife there.

From that contact a flood of power ran through Simon's whole body; but upon its heels came a surge of fear. For the men stood up, and the mild young man looked at Simon. Simon stared back at him, quaking.

The young man grinned. "Go to sleep, buddy," he directed. "You've got all night. I'll tuck you in when we say bye-bye."

He and Black Mustache proceeded to take off their shoes; they lay down, Black Mustache on the couch, the younger man on the berth below Simon. They would rest a while, till it was time to leave the train at Albany.

When the mild young man turned off the light, leaving the drawing-room in almost total darkness, Simon's eyes shone with delight. He saw triumph waiting for his hand.

Some forty-five minutes later, as the train began to slow down in the outer yards at Springfield, the

porter on duty in that particular car heard his bell buzz; he looked at the indicator and saw that the button had been pressed in the upper berth in Drawing-Room A.

There would be time to answer the call before the train stopped, so he went along the curtained aisle between the made-up berths, and pushed the button on the door of the drawing-room. He heard the buzzer sound inside; but for a moment there was no response. The porter rang again.

After a momentary interval, someone called in a cautious voice: "Who's there?"

"You rung for the porter, sir," said the man at the door.

The man inside started to reply; but his words seemed to be cut off. There was a moment's silence, and a movement as though the man might be coming to open the door, and then a tumbling sound. And suddenly a vast confusion, a shot, and a sharp cry.

The porter backed off with some precipitation. He ran headlong to fetch the conductor. There was something going on in Drawing-Room A.

What was going on in Drawing-Room A was this. In that dark interior, illumined only by the dim crack of light beneath the curtain on the window that opened into the corridor, Black Mustache had been lying awake on the couch, while the mild young man slept lightly in the lower berth. Black Mustache was considering the advisability of rising, while his companion slept, to remove all fear of what the captive in the upper

berth might later have to say. Only the possibility that the mild young man might wake and resent his action made him hesitate.

While he weighed this murderous project pro and con, someone came to the door of the drawing-room and pressed the button; the buzzer sounded sharply, and Black Mustache sat up in a sudden strict alarm. He sat up and stared at the door, quite forgetting Simon now.

The buzzer rang again, and Black Mustache got lightly to his feet; he touched the elbow of the mild young man, who half rose, fumbling for the weapon by his side. And Black Mustache leaned toward the door.

He called: "Who's there?"

Someone had rung for the porter, it appeared. But Black Mustache said harshly:

"No, we——"

And as he spoke he was already turning toward the upper berth, ready to do destruction there.

But before he could finish what he wished to say, something happened to him. He gasped and was silent, snatching desperately at his throat. Out of the darkness of the upper berth there had dropped around his neck a light, running noose of stout cord, which instantly tightened in a cruel grip and would not easily be loosened. He snatched at it; but it had bitten so deep into his flesh that his fingers found no hold. He tottered and stumbled, and the mild young man in the lower berth ejaculated:

"What's the matter, Ed?"

Black Mustache, by way of reply, fell to his knees on the floor, still fighting at that deadly, choking cord.

The mild young man understood that something was seriously wrong, and he scrambled out of the berth, the gun in his hand. He stood up and looked into the black cavern of the upper berth, where their captive was bestowed. But before he could see anything, he saw a million stars; for something lashed him across the open eyes. The darkness was so complete that his eyes had no warning; the lids had not time to close. The mild young man screamed with pain, and his hands clenched, and the gun exploded, and then another stinging blow in the face made him recoil so that he fell sidewise and down in a heap upon the struggling bulk that was Black Mustache.

Outside the drawing-room, feet were stumbling up the aisle of the car.

Something dropped from the upper berth to the couch, to the floor. This was young Simon Gary, the man who was afraid. Simon snatched his pants and jumped into them. He fumbled for his shoes, and found them; found also the mild young man's abandoned gun. He thrust his feet into the shoes; and with the gun in his hand he pulled open the door of the drawing-room.

The conductor was there, and a passenger or two, and a gray-faced porter in the background. As Simon opened the door, the train stopped in the Springfield station with a lurch which threw Simon

into their arms. He pressed the pistol into the conductor's hands.

"Bank robbers!" he cried. "Hold them! I'll get a cop!"

And he raced along the aisle.

While they were still bewildered, he had disappeared; but there was enough to occupy them here. It was the conductor who turned on the light in the drawing-room, the gun ready in his hand. But the two men in the little apartment were thoroughly subdued. Black Mustache had freed that noose about his neck at last; but he was still gasping for breath. The mild young man was babbling in an awful pain.

Besides these two human beings, there were three things in the drawing-room which the conductor did find interesting. There was a small black bag full of bills of moderate denominations, the whole running to a staggering sum. But there was also a whip like a knout, which had been made by cutting off one end of the clothes hammock in the upper berth, leaving eight or nine inches of dangling cords. And there was a noose made of hammock cord, which had been laboriously braided into a three-ply strand, with a running knot which tightened when the noose was drawn, and held it stubbornly.

Not till the conductor had inspected all these matters did he look about to discover the recklessly daring hero who with no other weapon than a Pullman hammock had overcome two bank robbers and a gun; but by that time Simon was gone!

Simon had departed in haste, because the train to Boston which he hoped to catch must be already in the station. He knew his time-tables. From the car platform he saw the other train on a near-by track, and he jumped from the Pullman vestibule across the fence which divided west- from east-bound tracks, and boarded the other train as it began to move. He dropped into a seat there like a man reprieved.

There was still the chance that his absence from the store might have been discovered; but aside from that one possibility, he had nothing to fear. He had even saved his belt, the belt which had fastened his ankles. When his hands were free, he had unbuckled the belt and buckled it around his waist again; because Alice would blame him if he lost so necessary an article.

Once aboard the train for home, he gave no thought to what was done; his thoughts cast ahead to what there was yet to do. He alighted at Newtonville at eleven thirty-one; and he waited till the eleven-forty-two from town should arrive. By that train Alice would expect him home; when it had come and gone he trudged up the street happily.

He let himself into the house and left his hat and coat and went upstairs. He undressed in the dark; for Alice did not like her sleep disturbed. But when he got into bed, she roused enough to ask:

“What time is it, dear?”

“Two minutes of twelve,” he told her gently.

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"You came straight home, didn't you?" She sighed approvingly, and touched his arm, and went to sleep again.

And Simon relaxed by her side, unutterably relieved. He had reached home on time; he need no longer be afraid.

HONOR AMONG THIEVES

By

Arthur Somers Roche

A SUDDEN agoraphobia attacked me. Terror of the outdoors shook me, crumpled my knees, made me reach desperately out for support. My hand touched a letter-box, and I clung to it as if it were a log, and I a swimmer struggling in midstream. The pedestrians' faces were blurred; the motors that thronged the avenue became prehistoric monsters that had cornered me, were about to devour me.

Fingers deprecatingly touched my arm.

"'Scuse, lady, but I gotta collect——"

I looked into the pale eyes of a postman. Sanity returned to me as quickly as it had left. The postman's features were clearly defined; I could even

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read the timid bewilderment in his eyes. The motors were motors again, and I was no longer a naked bit of humanity fleeing from slaver jaws. A couple of leering men moved on, deprived of the delectable sight of a woman fainting.

I took a step away from the sustaining letter-box, but my knees were still weak, weak from a terror that was the more dreadful because it was incomprehensible. I, Lydia Grey, who had never been ill in my life, who had never been afraid of anything, to be panicked by nothing? Of what was I afraid? Certainly these buildings were not likely to collapse; the herded motors were not going to run up on the sidewalk; the pedestrians were not going to trample me to death. . . . And even as I assured myself of these certainties, I felt a recurrence of fear.

I stepped instantly through the open door of a shop. The cool quiet of the subdued interior calmed me. I was able, as a frock-coated clerk bowed a welcome, to keep tremor from my voice.

No, I didn't believe that I wished to buy anything, but if I might see some bar-pins. . . . He showed me, I imagine, dozens—but I have no recollection of their beauty or of their cost. For while my lips smiled mechanically, and my voice uttered polite objections to each proffered jewel, my mind was busied with an effort at analysis of myself.

I was frightened of no one thing; that I knew. To say that the outdoors terrified me was also untrue. Agoraphobia, yes. I had read—in that Midwestern university where the name of Lydia Grey

stood for recklessness on the soccer field, in the gym, in the pool—of the mental quirks that drove people into panic. But it wasn't the outdoors, it wasn't people. . . . I loved the city streets as well as I loved the green hills of that State where I had been born. And I loved people, loved crowds, loved to watch humanity in the mass.

It was life, I suddenly decided, that frightened me—and because life itself cannot be reduced to a single manifestation, it had insinuated its terrors in the form of agoraphobia.

My clerk, with an apology, left me for a moment. Idly, fingering the pins which he had trustingly left on the counter, I watched him attend the imperious customer who could not brook delay, whose snorting impatience had made the salesman leave me.

He wanted—and his voice was loud enough to inform the passers-by—the necklace, the pearl necklace, which last week he had left to be restrung. This was the second time he had called for it, and if it wasn't ready he'd give his custom to some other firm, some firm that would appreciate the trade of a man who bought sixty-thousand-dollar necklaces, and twenty-thousand-dollar bracelets.

He gave as complete and nauseating an exhibition of wealthy vulgarity as I had ever witnessed. Not even at the "shimmy" tables of Deauville had I ever seen as gross and blatant an example of the *nouveau riche*.

And physically he was a match for his manners.

Over six feet tall, he must have weighed close to two hundred and fifty pounds. His lips were thick, and his nose a mere blob. His eyes, oddly enough, were keenly intelligent, and but for this feature he would have resembled a great pig. Well, even a pig's eyes sparkle, I suppose.

I dropped the bar-pin over which my fingers had unconsciously closed. As I looked at the loud-voiced customer, temptation had swept over me. If such as he possessed the treasures of this earth, then such possession was an injustice, and I would remedy injustice, where it struck me, instantly.

And now I knew why I feared life. I feared it because of poverty. I felt that life was lying in wait for me, eager to wreak mean evils upon me, the shabby evils of harsh economy—perhaps even of starvation. This shop, with its jewels lying carelessly on velvet pads upon the show-case, was now as terrifying as the outdoors had been a few moments ago. I knew that if the clerk lingered another minute with his gross client I would slip one of these pins into my purse. . . .

“Nothing pleases madame?”

He was behind the show-case now, and could not know that my ungloved palm was wet, and my heart thumping against my ribs. Ten seconds more, and I would have been a thief!

But he had returned. I was not a thief; I was a woman in what seemed desperate straits, but I was not a thief—*yet*, I added to myself; for if it is imagination that makes us susceptible to nervous disorders, it is also imagination that makes us able

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to read ourselves, to understand our potentialities; and I was beginning to understand mine.

I thanked the dapper clerk for his courtesy, and left the shop. Outside, I felt no more panic. Life had momentarily lost certain of its terrifying aspects because, deep down in my brain, light was beginning to gleam.

It was the luncheon hour, and deliberately I chose Ramon's, the fashion of the fickle moment, and therefore the most expensive restaurant in town. But there has always been something soothing to me in the atmosphere of luxury; and I needed something soothing now, when I was about to examine into myself for the first time in my life—when I was going to find out what was this thing called Lydia Grey.

A slice of melon, a chop, a salad, an ice and coffee. These I ordered from the deferential waiter, and then leaned back in my chair at a side table, and surveyed the luncheon throng.

Débutantes, dowagers, middle-aged and elderly men, a sprinkling of apparent bachelors. And all of them, save perhaps the single men, obviously moneyed, obviously accustomed to such places as Ramon's. Pretty girls, expensively dressed girls—what did any of them have that I lacked?

Beauty? Well, perhaps one or two of them had more obvious good looks. But my figure is straight and slim, and I am of nice height. My hair, dark brown and wavy, cut short and parted on the left side, is glossy and alive. My eyes are gray, long-lashed and well-spaced, and my nose is straight

and not too thin. My mouth is perhaps a shade too wide for beauty, and it may be that my chin is a trifle obstinate. Nevertheless—if it means anything—I had been voted the prettiest girl in the senior class at college.

And I know how to dress. Some of the girls here may have spent more money for their clothes, but mine came direct from a place off the Rue de Rivoli, which is a third as expensive as the shops of the Rue de la Paix, and just as up-to-the-moment. The side glances cast my way as I followed the *maître d'hôtel* to my table had been evidence enough of that.

I had, then, outwardly as much as any woman here. Inwardly, I thought I was the superior of most of them. Finishing-schools—and Junior Leaguers rarely go beyond those—are not to be compared with State universities in matters educational.

Deportment? I thought I could pass muster. All I lacked was money. Oh, position, too—but that and money, if not equivalent, can be made so by the addition of brains.

Yet I smiled bitterly as I thought of what a difference the lack of money made. These girls would go on to good and brilliant marriages; they would spend the correct months in Palm Beach, the proper seasons in Newport or Southampton or the Lido; they would shoot in Scotland and golf in Pinehurst; their children would go to the proper schools. . . .

And I, Lydia Grey, as beautiful and well-

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groomed as any, better educated than most, as charming and desirable, would—what? Well, if I observed the teachings of my good parents, I would get a job in some shop or office, would in desperation marry a clerk, would live in the Bronx. . . .

I wouldn't do any of these things. Rather sink to infamy than to mediocrity! And as I ate my chop I wondered what the class prophet would think if she could see Lydia Grey now and read her inmost thoughts. For in the prophecy it had been written that I would marry brilliantly, would be a great social leader—I laughed at the unsophistication of the prophet—and would bring honor to the name of—but I won't mention my college.

And the object of these flattering prophecies sat now in Ramon's, the owner of seven hundred dollars, and possessed by terrors which for the moment were subdued, but which would come racing back at any moment to conquer. Unless I did something to keep them in subjection. And I knew, definitely and absolutely, what I would do—had known, indeed, from the moment that my fingers had closed in desperation about the bar-pin. I would steal!

I forced back a gasp of horror as I came to my decision. When a decision had been made, it was too late to regret. At least, whatever else I was, and despite the panic of recent hours, I was no coward. I could look at myself understandingly; and that takes courage.

By every right save that of inheritance I belonged in the class which lunched at Ramon's. I did not belong among those who toiled and economized and lived drably. And as conscience interposed an objection to this, I retorted that people belong where they permit themselves to be placed. I had given no permission to life to set me down among the obscure; people rose from obscurity by sheer determination; and if one possessed determination, but no talent—well, only a weakling would let lack of talent deter one from rising.

The world so far had found in me no element of greatness which it chose to honor and reward; very well—I would do without honor and would take reward where I found it. With money I could live pleasantly, could mingle, I was sure, with the people who flitted in and out of Ramon's.

And now, my decision made, I found horror giving way to calm. I glanced, with an assurance I had not felt before, about the dining-room. There a bracelet sparkled; there pearls glimmered softly. I could feel my lips softening, curving in a smile of anticipation. And then, as the waiter placed the check before me, all this unreal calm, the calm that comes between two hurricanes, deserted me.

For my groping fingers told me that my purse was empty!

I knew that there had been at least twenty dollars in it when I left my apartment. And when one is as close to poverty as I found myself, one makes no mistakes about the amount of money on one's

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person. I smiled as I realized that I, who grandiosely planned theft on a great scale, had been the victim of a cheap pickpocket.

I turned the smile upon the waiter and saw that his eyes hardened. He seemed to know, before I spoke, the tale I was about to tell him. And if anything had been needed to steel my new determination, his manner would have been that thing. For he was unprepared to extend me gracious credit. And only, I knew, because he did not know me. I could not be fashionable, else he would recognize me. I could read his thoughts before they were formulated in his mind. If the rotogravures featured me, if the gossip columns speculated on my newest admirer, such a matter as forgetting a purse would be inconsequential. The waiter, the *mâitre d'hôtel*, would gladly lend me taxi-money, would accept my signature on the back of the luncheon-check. . . .

People, singly, are rarely responsive to emotional waves, unless that emotion be of love. But a crowd is strangely sensitive to whatever is going on in the neighborhood. Let one person move nervously in a theater, and a whole audience stirs, coughs. . . . So now, my own silly despair—the matter was not that serious—and the waiter's sullenness, combined to turn heads in my direction, to make me the object of a regard that I felt supercilious. Or perhaps it was my overheated imagination. I was, as you have gathered, not too cool of judgment this day.

At any rate, it seemed to me that every face was

leering, that everyone present knew my plight, and I hated them for the knowledge which I assumed they possessed.

"Send the *maître d'hôtel* to me," I said to the waiter.

He turned, his shrug insolent—and as he moved away I met the eyes of the loud-voiced gentleman of the jewelry-shop. I will say for him that, for all his grossness, in matters such as these he moved with quiet ease. For no one would have guessed that he had not known me for years as he slipped into the seat opposite me.

"Please," he said softly, at the panic in my eyes. "You forgot your purse—it is quite obvious. I am Nathan Carteret. If you will permit me, Miss——"

"Grey," I said.

He smiled, his thick lips moving slowly, as though he relished something.

"More imaginative than Brown, or Jones," he said.

"Grey is really my name," I told him.

The *maître d'hôtel* arrived at the table.

"Miss Grey forgot her purse, Ramon," said Carteret. "Your waiters should be more discriminating. It is not in keeping with your establishment that a lady should be embarrassed."

"A thousand pardons, ma'amselle!" cried Ramon. "But the waiter did not tell me—he said you wished me——"

"Miss Grey was embarrassed——"

"And I also," said Ramon, "that any client

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should feel ill at ease because of a mischance. If ma'amselle will honor me by lunching with me——”

Carteret smilingly shook his head.

“Miss Grey will do me the honor to lunch with me, Ramon. But you should speak to your waiter. A waiter should be the soul of tact, of discretion. He should be able to read thoughts while they are yet unformulated in the client's mind.”

“M'sieur should be a *maître d'hôtel*,” said Ramon, bowing.

“I am flattered at your confidence,” laughed Carteret.

“I don't know how to thank you,” I said to him, as Ramon smirkingly withdrew. “My bag was opened—the money stolen——”

“But outside the sun shines; in here it is cool, charming—and coffee is served,” he said. “I miss,” he continued, “the sidewalk cafés of Paris. Don't you?”

This was a different man from that gross creature who had berated the jewelry-clerk. This was a man of culture, of wide interests, traveled, entertaining. His reminiscences ranged from mines in South America to pearl-fisheries in the Pacific. He had done everything, been everywhere, and known everyone. And as he spoke memory stirred in me; the name became familiar. Nathan Carteret was a man who had been barred, three years ago, from the Stock Exchange. A man of millions, the newspapers had printed much about his spectacular and ruthless career; his name was synonymous

with chicanery and cruelty. Women's names had been unpleasantly linked with his. And almost imperceptibly his conversation centered upon himself. I had heard of him? Of course. The lying press. Because he had started with nothing and amassed a fortune, he had incurred the enmity of rich cliques whom he had outwitted in the market. They called him vulgar and barred him from their clubs. He didn't know why he was telling all this to me, save that I seemed understanding, what the Italians would call *sympatica*. And he was sure that I could see that he was not what he had been represented in the papers, but was a cultured gentleman.

Yes, he actually said this, and all the effect his really brilliant conversation had created was dissipated before this crudity. He was what he had been in the jewelry-shop, what his appearance stated he was; and suddenly I hated myself for being under obligation to him for even such a trifle as a luncheon-check.

"And where," I finally managed to put in, "shall I send the money for my luncheon?"

"That is cruel," he said. "Could I not have the privilege of paying that?"

We still debated the matter as we reached the sidewalk outside Ramon's.

"At least," he said, "you will permit me to take you home?"

An afterthought seemed to strike him.

"I told you of my Greco. Wouldn't you like to see it? My apartment is only a few blocks from

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here. And listen to me, Miss Grey—you've told me a little of yourself, but I gather you are alone in New York. You perhaps, seek a career?"

"Perhaps," I admitted.

"I have vast interests. A place might be found for a woman of tact in one of those interests. You are a woman of the world, not bound, I trust, by the silly conventions that restrict most young women. You will come to my apartment and we will discuss matters?"

"Convention," I said, "means nothing to me; but—decency——"

"That is understood," he said. "Have I not told you that I am a gentleman?"

He had, and at the statement I would have left him, but for one thing: I seemed to hear opportunity knocking at my door.

"I'd like to see the Greco; and I'd be glad to talk business," I assured him.

Nineteen floors we rode in an elevator, to emerge finally upon the roof of his apartment house. His penthouse was a bungalow, surrounded by gardens. Both rivers and the bay were spread before my entranced eyes.

"It is lovely?" he asked.

"It is divine," I told him.

"It can be yours," he whispered.

"Thanks," I said. "Where is the Greco?"

I saw the painting; I saw bits of jade, jewels; things the possession of any one of which would keep me in luxury for a year. And I turned from

contemplation of a pearl necklace to find his face close to mine, his huge arms about me.

"That necklace—I got it back from the jeweler's to-day," he whispered. "For some one else—but it's yours——"

"Please," I said. "You told me——"

"Told you? Of course I told you. That's part of the game, isn't it?" he jeered. "The kind of women that I'd want would need assurance. But after all—why did you come here? You let me speak to you in the restaurant, let me pay your check—you could have left a ring with the waiter; you let me——"

Some scenes bring blushes to the cheek at mere recollection; how much more agonizing are they when recounted! Suffice it that I got away from him, found myself on the elevator landing outside his penthouse, with my nerves shaken, my arms bruised, and my heart burning with rage. But even as I rang the elevator bell, balance returned to me.

How could I blame Carteret for his hopes? I had let an absolute stranger pay my luncheon-check, I had permitted him to take me to his apartment. What else could he think than what he obviously had thought? Why, if I were going to lead a dishonest life, I'd best begin paradoxically by being honest with myself. I'd gone with Carteret because I'd seen in him opportunity.

And now that he had shown that his boasted gentility was mere veneer, I felt my last scruple vanish. And I began to understand that I would never be able to ply my new career at the expense

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of kindly decent people; it must be at the expense of men like Carteret, who would have no scruples themselves.

The elevator door opened. I smiled at the operator and told him that the ring was a mistake. As he descended, I turned back and tried the door leading to the roof. It gave before me, and I slipped into the garden which had entranced me earlier. I tiptoed past some rose-bushes, looked into the living-room. I saw the great body of Carteret go through a door. Then I was inside, had picked up the pearl necklace, and was out in the garden again instantly.

As I crouched there, edging toward the door, I heard him call:

“Jacques! The pearl necklace!”

Then I was through the door and racing down the stairs that wound around the elevator. Two floors I’d gone when I heard Carteret’s booming voice.

“Jacques, run down the stairs—I’ll take the elevator—we’ll catch her——”

I heard the French butler’s response, heard the clatter of his feet upon the stairs above me. Of what avail were two flights’ start? Even if I could outspeed him—an impossibility—I would find Carteret waiting for me on the street level. And I knew that he would show no mercy; it would be the police court; or he would assure the building employees that there had been a mistake, and—I would return to the penthouse with him.

And when I had decided to throw **certain** scru-

ples out the window, I had not decided to let go of all. I would rather be dead than win Carteret's silence in the only way it could be won. I thought of hurling myself down the stairs. . . . A door, slightly ajar, on the third landing below Carteret's penthouse, called to me. I was through it, had closed it silently, and was standing there, ear pressed against its panels, when Jacques raced down outside. For a moment the hue and cry had passed me by. But only for a moment. Soon would begin that room-to-room search of which one sometimes reads in the newspapers. Well, I'd throw myself from a window before I'd be captured. But as I decided this, I smiled self-contemptuously.

Because poverty frightened me, I had decided to steal. I had thought, because I had education and wit, that thievery would be easy for me, that I could be successful. And here, in my first essay, I was a trembling fugitive!

"You would be more comfortable in here," said a lazy voice.

I wheeled, and in the semi-dusk descried the figure of a man. He sat at ease in an arm-chair, visible through hangings.

"My carelessness with that front door invites burglars," he said. "But you don't look like one. However, ladies rarely carry strings of pearls in their hands. You'd better put it about your neck, or in your purse—or return it to its owner. Which do you think most advisable?"

I could open the door, but outside was Carteret. To stay here, facing the gentle mockery in eye and

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voice of this young man was preferable. I entered his living-room. It was, I noted, as expensively done as Carteret's, but in better taste. Carteret knew good things, but he did not know that too many good things in one place kills the effect of all. This young man had taste.

"What do you think?" I asked—an inane question, but I sparred for time.

"The part of sanity is to withdraw, as gracefully as may be, from any task we find beyond our capabilities. You obviously are not fitted for thievery," he said.

"I have the necklace," I said brazenly.

"Temporary possession is nothing," he said. "I take it, from your hasty entrance, that pursuit is not far. May I ask the victim?"

I shrugged. There was nothing to be gained by hiding the facts.

"Nathan Carteret," I said.

"Ah," he said softly. "A tenacious gentleman! I'm afraid that the matter presents difficulties. My dear young lady, advice is the most unwelcome thing in the world. Yet may I offer it? Carteret, if you don't already know it, is a dangerous enemy. I'd make terms——"

"Good Lord," I cried, "I'm a thief! I dash in here, and you talk to me like a pedagogue——"

"A pedagogue of life—for all my apparent youth." And he smiled. "What would you have me do? Telephone for the police?"

"I'd have you hide me. They'll be here any moment," I cried.

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

"And make myself a partner in a theft? For a stranger—for a young woman, no matter how charming, whom I have never seen before? My chivalry won't carry me that far."

"Won't it?" I asked hopelessly.

"Certainly not," he said crisply. "To help you escape—yes. But to help you steal—no. Give me that necklace."

I stared at him. He was as different from Carteret as things of the same species may be. About thirty, slim, strong, good-looking—I liked the thinness of his lips, the twinkle in his hazel eyes.

"I've taken chances," I said slowly. "I went to the apartment of that beast Carteret. He deserves ill of all women. I took this necklace. I intend to keep it."

"And if I can't agree with you that Carteret's general beastliness makes him fair game for any thief—what then?"

"Then, before I'll be turned over to him, or to the police, I'll go out this window," I cried.

As I spoke I reached the open window and paused there. My host surveyed me.

"I think you mean it," he said softly. "Well, that changes things. My dear young lady, I shall not deliver you to Carteret. Will you please go in that room?" He pointed to an open door. "It might be as well to get in the closet. I think we'll have visitors soon."

I hid in the closet. I heard his voice, a little later, muffled and faint, as he turned callers away. And half an hour later he released me.

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"Carteret believes in miracles," he smiled. "He thinks you turned into thin air. But it isn't safe for you to leave yet. To-night, later—How did you happen to become a thief?"

I told him. Five hours later we were still arguing. He wanted me to give up the pearls, and I refused. He spoke of the dangers that lay ahead of me, and I laughed at him. Had I not succeeded in stealing this necklace?

"With my aid," he pointed out.

I admitted this. Still, I had the necklace. And I clung to it, nor could all the persuasions of Randolph Barnard, my host, change my mind. And so, at nine that night, when the commotion of the afternoon had quieted, I permitted Mr. Barnard to escort me to the elevator, to the street, and to a taxi. I even accepted from him a dollar to pay my taxi fee, having promised to send it to him in the first mail. And then, back in my own room, I opened my purse, into which I had crammed the pearls, to gloat over them. And they were gone!

Reckless that I might encounter Carteret, I took another taxi back to the apartment. I rode to Barnard's apartment, and rang the bell. There was no answer. I inquired for him at the desk, and was told that Mr. Barnard was not at home. He had left only five minutes ago, having piled his bags into a taxi, and stated that he was leaving the city. His furnishings? Oh, he had sublet the apartment from Mr. Wilson Davies.

In a daze I left the building, still careless that Carteret might encounter me. The remarkable

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

taste shown by Mr. Barnard had been a fraud, then. He had sublet the apartment. . . . Why, he had taken the necklace for *himself*, not to return to Carteret! His hasty surrender of his lease proved that. And I, who thought him generous, chivalrous, fine, had been gulled, duped!

I swore that I would never trust a man again. I swore that I would never be deceived by one. I'd rob them, cheat them. . . . I went to sleep with these thoughts, and they were still with me when I awakened. But they were gone ten minutes later, when I opened a package brought by the postman.

Bills—five thousand dollars, I later learned—tumbled to the floor. But I didn't count them then; I read the note that accompanied them.

My dear Miss Grey:

The laborer is worthy of his hire. I'd been planning an attack on our friend Carteret's jewel-safe for some time. In pursuance of that laudable scheme, I sublet an apartment in the same building. And to-day you bring the most desirable bit of Carteret's collection to me. I thank you. And that you may not be discouraged at the outset of your career, I send you a fair share of the spoils. You may think it too little, but I assure you that a necklace worth sixty thousand in the jewelry-shop is worth barely a quarter of that to a fence, and to a fence I shall take these pearls. If I realize more than I expect, and your share seems to me to be larger, I

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shall send the balance to you. For, dear Miss Grey, there must be honor among thieves.

Sincerely,

RANDOLPH BARNARD.

I read the letter. I should have torn it up; a sane thief destroys anything that may some day be used as evidence against him—or her. But I didn't. I kept it. I still have it. Why? I can't tell. Except that if there be honor among thieves, there may also be love. And I, Lydia Grey, but yesterday a woman of honor, to-day was a thief and—heaven help me—loved a thief; and prayed to see him again.

THE FAREWELL MURDER

By
Dasbiell Hammett

I WAS the only one who left the train at Farewell.

A man came through the rain from the passenger shed. He was a small man. His face was dark and flat. He wore a gray waterproof cap and a gray coat cut in military style.

He didn't look at me. He looked at the valise and gladstone bag in my hands. He came forward quickly, walking with short, choppy steps.

He didn't say anything when he took the bags from me. I asked:

"Kavalov's?"

He had already turned his back to me and was carrying my bags towards a tan Stutz coach that

stood in the roadway beside the gravel station platform. In answer to my question he bowed twice at the Stutz without looking around or checking his jerky half-trot.

I followed him to the car.

Three minutes of riding carried us through the village. We took a road that climbed westward into the hills. The road looked like a seal's back in the rain.

The flat-faced man was in a hurry. We purred over the road at a speed that soon carried us past the last of the cottages sprinkled up the hillside.

Presently we left the shiny black road for a paler one curving south to run along a hill's wooded crest. Now and then this road, for a hundred feet or more at a stretch, was turned into a tunnel by tall trees' heavily leafed boughs interlocking overhead.

Rain accumulated in fat drops on the boughs and came down to thump the Stutz's roof. The dullness of rainy early evening became almost the blackness of night inside these tunnels.

The flat-faced man switched on the lights, and increased our speed.

He sat rigidly erect at the wheel. I sat behind him. Above his military collar, among the hairs that were clipped short on the nape of his neck, globules of moisture made tiny shining points. The moisture could have been rain. It could have been sweat.

We were in the middle of one of the tunnels.

THE FAREWELL MURDER

The flat-faced man's head jerked to the left, and he screamed:

"A-a-a-a-a!"

It was a long, quivering, high-pitched bleat, thin with terror.

I jumped up, bending forward to see what was the matter with him.

The car swerved and plunged ahead, throwing me back on the seat again.

Through the side window I caught a one-eyed glimpse of something dark lying in the road.

I twisted around to try the back window, less rain-bleared.

I saw a black man lying on his back in the road, near the left edge. His body was arched, as if its weight rested on his heels and the back of his head. A knife handle that couldn't have been less than six inches long stood straight up in the air from the left side of his chest.

By the time I had seen this much we had taken a curve and were out of the tunnel.

"Stop," I called to the flat-faced man.

He pretended he didn't hear me. The Stutz was a tan streak under us. I put a hand on the driver's shoulder.

His shoulder squirmed under my hand, and he screamed "A-a-a-a-a!" again as if the dead black man had him.

I reached past him and shut off the engine.

He took his hands from the wheel and clawed up at me. Noises came from his mouth, but they didn't make any words that I knew.

DASHIELL HAMMETT

I got a hand on the wheel. I got my other forearm under his chin. I leaned over the back of his seat so that the weight of my upper body was on his head, mashing it down against the wheel.

Between this and that and the help of God, the Stutz hadn't left the road when it stopped moving.

I got up off the flat-faced man's head and asked:

"What the hell's the matter with you?"

He looked at me with white eyes, shivered, and didn't say anything.

"Turn it around," I said. "We'll go back there."

He shook his head from side to side, desperately, and made some more of the mouth-noises that might have been words if I could have understood them.

"You know who that was?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"You do," I growled.

He shook his head.

By then I was beginning to suspect that no matter what I said to this fellow I'd get only headshakes out of him.

I said:

"Get away from the wheel, then. I'm going to drive back there."

He opened the door and scrambled out.

"Come back here," I called.

He backed away, shaking his head.

I cursed him, slid in behind the wheel, said, "All right, wait here for me," and slammed the door.

THE FAREWELL MURDER

He retreated backwards slowly, watching me with scared, whitish eyes while I backed and turned the coach.

I had to drive back farther than I had expected, something like a mile.

I didn't find the black man. The tunnel was empty.

If I had known the exact spot in which he had been lying, I might have been able to find something to show how he had been removed. But I hadn't had time to pick out a landmark, and now any one of four or five places looked like the spot.

With the help of the coach's lamps I went over the left side of the road from one end of the tunnel to the other.

I didn't find any blood. I didn't find any footprints. I didn't find anything to show that anybody had been lying in the road. I didn't find anything.

It was too dark by now for me to try searching the woods.

I returned to where I had left the flat-faced man.

He was gone.

It looked, I thought, as if Mr. Kavalov might be right in thinking he needed a detective.

II

Half a mile beyond the place where the flat-faced man had deserted me, I stopped the Stutz in front of a grilled steel gate that blocked the road. The gate was padlocked on the inside. From

either side of it tall hedging ran off into the woods. The upper part of a brown-roofed small house was visible over the hedge-top to the left.

I worked the Stutz's horn.

The racket brought a gawky boy of fifteen or sixteen to the other side of the gate. He had on bleached whipcord pants and a wildly striped sweater. He didn't come out to the middle of the road, but stood at one side, with one arm out of sight as if holding something that was hidden from me by the hedge.

"This Kavalov's?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he said uneasily.

I waited for him to unlock the gate. He didn't unlock it. He stood there looking uneasily at the car and at me.

"Please, mister," I said, "can I come in?"

"What—who are you?"

"I'm the guy that Kavalov sent for. If I'm not going to be let in, tell me, so I can catch the six-fifty back to San Francisco."

The boy chewed his lip, said, "Wait till I see if I can find the key," and went out of sight behind the hedge.

He was gone long enough to have had a talk with somebody.

When he came back he unlocked the gate, swung it open, and said:

"It's all right, sir. They're expecting you."

When I had driven through the gate I could see lights on a hilltop a mile or so ahead and to the left.

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"Is that the house?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. They're expecting you."

Close to where the boy had stood while talking to me through the gate, a double-barrel shotgun was propped up against the hedge.

I thanked the boy and drove on. The road wound gently uphill through farm land. Tall, slim trees had been planted at regular intervals on both sides of the road.

The road brought me at last to the front of a building that looked like a cross between a fort and a factory in the dusk. It was built of concrete. Take a flock of squat cones of various sizes, round off the points bluntly, mash them together with the largest one somewhere near the center, the others grouped around it in not too strict accordance with their sizes, adjust the whole collection to agree with the slopes of a hilltop, and you would have a model of the Kavalov house. The windows were steel-sashed. There weren't very many of them. No two were in line either vertically or horizontally. Some were lighted.

As I got out of the car, the narrow front door of this house opened.

A short, red-faced woman of fifty or so, with faded blonde hair wound around and around her head, came out. She wore a high-necked, tight-sleeved, gray woolen dress. When she smiled her mouth seemed wide as her hips.

She said:

"You're the gentleman from the city?"

DASHIELL HAMMETT

"Yeah. I lost your chauffeur somewhere back on the road."

"Lord bless you," she said amiably, "that's all right."

A thin man with thin dark hair plastered down above a thin, worried face came past her to take my bags when I had lifted them out of the car. He carried them indoors.

The woman stood aside for me to enter, saying:

"Now I suppose you'll want to wash up a little bit before you go in to dinner, and they won't mind waiting for you the few minutes you'll take if you hurry."

I said, "Yeah, thanks," waited for her to get ahead of me again, and followed her up a curving flight of stairs that climbed along the inside of one of the cones that made up the building.

She took me to a second-story bedroom where the thin man was unpacking my bags.

"Martin will get you anything you need," she assured me from the doorway, "and when you're ready, just come on downstairs."

I said I would, and she went away. The thin man had finished unpacking by the time I had got out of coat, vest, collar and shirt. I told him there wasn't anything else I needed, washed up in the adjoining bathroom, put on a fresh shirt and collar, my vest and coat, went downstairs.

The wide hall was empty. Voices came through an open doorway to the left.

One voice was a nasal whine. It complained:

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"I will not have it. I will not put up with it. I am not a child, and I will not have it."

This voice's t's were a little too thick for t's, but not thick enough to be d's.

Another voice was a lively, but slightly harsh, barytone. It said cheerfully:

"What's the good of saying we won't put up with it, when we are putting up with it?"

The third voice was feminine, a soft voice, but flat and spiritless. It said:

"But perhaps he did kill him."

The whining voice said: "I do not care. I will not have it."

The barytone voice said, cheerfully as before: "Oh, won't you?"

A doorknob turned farther down the hall. I didn't want to be caught standing there listening. I advanced to the open doorway.

III

I was in the doorway of a low-ceilinged oval room furnished and decorated in gray, white and silver. Two men and a woman were there.

The older man—he was somewhere in his fifties—got up from a deep gray chair and bowed ceremoniously at me. He was a plump man of medium height, completely bald, dark-skinned and pale-eyed. He wore a wax-pointed gray mustache and a straggly gray imperial.

"Mr. Kavalov?" I asked.

"Yes, sir." His was the whining voice.

DASHIELL HAMMETT

I told him who I was. He shook my hand and then introduced me to the others.

The woman was his daughter. She was probably thirty. She had her father's narrow, full-lipped mouth, but her eyes were dark; her nose was short and straight, and her skin was almost colorless. Her face had Asia in it. It was pretty, passive, unintelligent.

The man with the barytone voice was her husband. His name was Ringgo. He was six or seven years older than his wife, neither tall nor heavy, but well set-up. His left arm was in splints and a sling. The knuckles of his right hand were darkly bruised. He had a lean, bony, quick-witted face, bright dark eyes with plenty of lines around them, and a good-natured hard mouth.

He gave me his bruised hand, wriggled his bandaged arm at me, grinned, and said:

"I'm sorry you missed this, but the future injuries are yours."

"How did it happen?" I asked.

Kavalov raised a plump hand.

"Time enough it is to go into that when we have eaten," he said. "Let us have our dinner first."

We went into a small green and brown dining-room where a small square table was set. I sat facing Ringgo across a silver basket of orchids that stood between tall silver candlesticks in the center of the table. Mrs. Ringgo sat to my right, Kavalov to my left. When Kavalov sat down I saw the shape of an automatic pistol in his hip pocket.

THE FAREWELL MURDER

Two men servants waited on us. There was a lot of food and all of it was well turned out. We ate caviar, some sort of consommé, sand dabs, potatoes and cucumber jelly, roast lamb, corn and string beans, asparagus, wild duck and hominy cakes, artichoke-and-tomato salad, and orange ice. We drank white wine, claret, Burgundy, coffee and *crème de menthe*.

Kavalov ate and drank enormously. None of us skimped.

Kavalov was the first to disregard his own order that nothing be said about his troubles until after we had eaten. When he had finished his soup he put down his spoon and said:

"I am not a child. I will not be frightened."

He blinked pale, worried eyes defiantly at me, his lips pouting between mustache and imperial.

Ringgo grinned pleasantly at him. Mrs. Ringgo's face was as serene and inattentive as if nothing had been said.

"What is there to be frightened of?" I asked.

"Nothing," Kavalov said. "Nothing excepting a lot of idiotic and very pointless trickery and play-acting."

"You can call it anything you want to call it," a voice grumbled over my shoulder, "but I seen what I seen."

The voice belonged to one of the men who was waiting on the table, a sallow, youngish man with a narrow, slack-lipped face. He spoke with a subdued sort of stubbornness, and without looking up from the dish he was putting before me.

Since nobody else paid any attention to the servant's clearly audible remark, I turned my face to Kavalov again. He was trimming the edge of a sand dab with the side of his fork.

"What kind of trickery and play-acting?" I asked.

Kavalov put down his fork and rested his wrists on the edge of the table. He rubbed his lips together and leaned over his plate towards me.

"Supposing"—he wrinkled his forehead so that his bald scalp twitched forward—"you have done injury to a man ten years ago." He turned his wrists quickly, laying his hands palms-up on the white cloth. "You have done this injury in the ordinary business manner—you understand?—for profit. There is not anything personal concerned. You do not hardly know him. And then supposing he came to you after all those ten years and said to you: 'I have come to watch you die.'" He turned his hands over, palms down. "Well, what would you think?"

"I wouldn't," I replied, "think I ought to hurry up my dying on his account."

The earnestness went out of his face, leaving it blank. He blinked at me for a moment and then began eating his fish. When he had chewed and swallowed the last piece of sand dab he looked up at me again. He shook his head slowly, drawing down the corners of his mouth.

"That was not a good answer," he said. He shrugged, and spread his fingers. "However, you

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will have to deal with this Captain Cat-and-mouse. It is for that I engaged you."

I nodded.

Ringgo smiled and patted his bandaged arm, saying:

"I wish you more luck with him than I had."

Mrs. Ringgo put out a hand and let the pointed fingertips touch her husband's wrist for a moment.

I asked Kavalov:

"This injury I was to suppose I had done: how serious was it?"

He pursed his lips, made little wavy motions with the fingers of his right hand, and said:

"Oh—ah—ruin."

"We can take it for granted, then, that your captain's really up to something?"

"Good God!" said Ringgo, dropping his fork. "I wouldn't like to think he'd broken my arm just in fun."

Behind me the sallow servant spoke to his mate:

"He wants to know if we think the captain's really up to something."

"I heard him," the other said gloomily. "A lot of help he's going to be to us."

Kavalov tapped his plate with a fork and made angry faces at the servants.

"Shut up," he said. "Where is the roast?" He pointed the fork at Mrs. Ringgo. "Her glass is empty." He looked at the fork. "See what care they take of my silver," he complained, holding it out to me. "It has not been cleaned decently in a month."

DASHIELL HAMMETT

He put the fork down. He pushed back his plate to make room for his forearms on the table. He leaned over them, hunching his shoulders. He sighed. He frowned. He stared at me with pleading pale eyes.

"Listen," he whined. "Am I a fool? Would I send to San Francisco for a detective if I did not need a detective? Would I pay you what you are charging me, when I could get plenty good enough detectives for half of that, if I did not require the best detective I could secure? Would I require so expensive a one if I did not know this captain for a completely dangerous fellow?"

I didn't say anything. I sat still and looked attentive.

"Listen," he whined. "This is not April-foolery. This captain means to murder me. He came here to murder me. He will certainly murder me if somebody does not stop him from it."

"Just what has he done so far?" I asked.

"That is not it." Kavalov shook his bald head impatiently. "I do not ask you to undo anything that he has done. I ask you to keep him from killing me. What has he done so far? Well, he has terrorized my people most completely. He has broken Dolph's arm. He has done these things so far, if you must know."

"How long has this been going on? How long has he been here?"

"A week and two days."

"Did your chauffeur tell you about the black man we saw in the road?"

THE FAREWELL MURDER

Kavalov pushed his lips together and nodded slowly.

"He wasn't there when I went back," I said.

He blew out his lips with a little puff and cried excitedly:

"I do not care anything about your black men and your roads. I care about not being murdered."

"Have you said anything to the sheriff's office?" I asked, trying to pretend I wasn't getting peevish.

"That I have done. But to what good? Has he threatened me? Well, he has told me he has come to watch me die. From him, the way he said it, that is a threat. But to your sheriff it is not a threat. He has terrorized my people. Have I proof that he has done that? The sheriff says I have not. What absurdity! Do I need proof? Don't I know? Must he leave fingerprints on the fright he causes? So it comes to this: the sheriff will keep an eye on him. 'An eye,' he said, mind you. Here I have twenty people, servants and farm hands, with forty eyes. And he comes and goes as he likes. An eye!"

"How about Ringgo's arm?" I asked.

Kavalov shook his head impatiently and began to cut up his lamb.

Ringgo said:

"There's nothing we can do about that. I hit him first." He looked at his bruised knuckles. "I didn't think he was that tough. Maybe I'm not as good as I used to be. Anyway, a dozen people saw me punch his jaw before he touched me. We performed at high noon in front of the post office."

"Who is this captain?"

DASHIELL HAMMETT

"It's not him," the sallow servant said. "It's that black devil."

Ringgo said:

"Sherry's his name, Hugh Sherry. He was a captain in the British army when we knew him before—quartermaster's department in Cairo. That was in 1917, all of twelve years ago. The commodore"—he nodded his head at his father-in-law—"was speculating in military supplies. Sherry should have been a line officer. He had no head for desk work. He wasn't timid enough. Somebody decided the commodore wouldn't have made so much money if Sherry hadn't been so careless. They knew Sherry hadn't made any money for himself. They cashiered Sherry at the same time they asked the commodore please to go away."

Kavalov looked up from his plate to explain.

"Business is like that in wartime. They wouldn't let me go away if I had done anything they could keep me there for."

"And now, twelve years after you had him kicked out of the army in disgrace," I said, "he comes here, threatens to kill you, so you believe, and sets out to spread panic among your people. Is that it?"

"That is not it," Kavalov whined. "That is not it at all. I did not have him kicked out of any armies. I am a man of business. I take my profits where I find them. If somebody lets me take a profit that angers his employers, what is their anger to me? Second, I do not believe he means to kill me. I know that."

THE FAREWELL MURDER

"I'm trying to get it straight in my mind."

"There is nothing to get straight. A man is going to murder me. I ask you not to let him do it. Is not that simple enough?"

"Simple enough," I agreed, and stopped trying to talk to him.

Kavalov and Ringgo were smoking cigars, Mrs. Ringgo and I cigarettes over *crème de menthe* when the red-faced blonde woman in gray wool came in.

She came in hurriedly. Her eyes were wide open and dark. She said:

"Anthony says there's a fire in the upper field."

Kavalov crunched his cigar between his teeth and looked pointedly at me.

I stood up, asking:

"How do I get there?"

"I'll show you the way," Ringgo said, leaving his chair.

"Dolph," his wife protested, "your arm."

He smiled gently at her and said:

"I'm not going to interfere. I'm only going along to see how an expert handles these things."

IV

I ran up to my room for hat, coat, flashlight and gun.

The Ringgos were standing at the front door when I started downstairs again.

He had put on a dark raincoat, buttoned tight over his injured arm, its left sleeve hanging empty.

DASHIELL HAMMETT

His right arm was around his wife. Both of her bare arms were around his neck. She was bent far back, he far forward over her. Their mouths were together.

Retreating a little, I made more noise with my feet when I came into sight again. They were standing apart at the door, waiting for me. Ringgo was breathing heavily, as if he had been running. He opened the door.

Mrs. Ringgo addressed me:

"Please don't let my foolish husband be too reckless."

I said I wouldn't, and asked him:

"Worth while taking any of the servants or farm hands along?"

He shook his head.

"Those that aren't hiding would be as useless as those that are," he said. "They've all had it taken out of them."

He and I went out, leaving Mrs. Ringgo looking after us from the doorway. The rain had stopped for the time, but a black muddle overhead promised more presently.

Ringgo led me around the side of the house, along a narrow path that went downhill, through shrubbery, past a group of small buildings in a shallow valley, and diagonally up another, lower, hill.

The path was soggy. At the top of the hill we left the path, going through a wire gate and across a stubbly field that was both gummy and slimy under our feet. We moved along swiftly. The

THE FAREWELL MURDER

gumminess of the ground, the sultriness of the night air, and our coats, made the going warm work.

When we had crossed this field we could see the fire, a spot of flickering orange beyond intervening trees. We climbed a low wire fence and wound through the trees.

A violent rustling broke out among the leaves overhead, starting at the left, ending with a solid thud against a tree trunk just to our right. Then something *plopped* on the soft ground under the tree.

Off to the left a voice laughed, a savage, hooting laugh.

The laughing voice couldn't have been far away. I went after it.

The fire was too small and too far away to be of much use to me: blackness was nearly perfect among the trees.

I stumbled over roots, bumped into trees, and found nothing. The flashlight would have helped the laugher more than me, so I kept it idle in my hand.

When I got tired of playing peek-a-boo with myself, I cut through the woods to the field on the other side, and went down to the fire.

The fire had been built in one end of the field, a dozen feet or less from the nearest tree. It had been built of dead twigs and broken branches that the rain had missed, and had nearly burnt itself out by the time I reached it.

Two small forked branches were stuck in the

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ground on opposite sides of the fire. Their forks held the ends of a length of green sapling. Spitted on the sapling, hanging over the fire, was an eighteen-inch-long carcass, headless, tailless, footless, skinless, and split down the front.

On the ground a few feet away lay an airedale puppy's head, pelt, feet, tail, insides, and a lot of blood.

There was some dry sticks, broken in convenient lengths, beside the fire. I put them on as Ringgo came out of the woods to join me. He carried a stone the size of a grapefruit in his hand.

"Get a look at him?" he asked.

"No. He laughed and went."

He held out the stone to me, saying:

"This is what was chucked at us."

Drawn on the smooth gray stone, in red, were round blank eyes, a triangular nose, and a grinning, toothy mouth—a crude skull.

I scratched one of the red eyes with a fingernail, and said:

"Crayon."

Ringgo was staring at the carcass sizzling over the fire and at the trimmings on the ground.

"What do you make of that?" I asked.

He swallowed and said:

"Mickey was a damned good little dog."

"Yours?"

He nodded.

I went around with my flashlight on the ground. I found some footprints, such as they were.

"Anything?" Ringgo asked.

THE FAREWELL MURDER

"Yeah." I showed him one of the prints. "Made with rags tied around his shoes. They're no good."

We turned to the fire again.

"This is another show," I said. "Whoever killed and cleaned the pup knew his stuff; knew it too well to think he could cook him decently like that. The outside will be burnt before the inside's even warm, and the way he's put on the spit he'd fall off if you tried to turn him."

Ringgo's scowl lightened a bit.

"That's a little better," he said. "Having him killed is rotten enough, but I'd hate to think of anybody eating Mickey, or even meaning to."

"They didn't," I assured him. "They were putting on a show. This the sort of thing that's been happening?"

"Yes."

"Whats the sense of it?"

He glumly quoted Kavalov:

"Captain Cat-and-mouse."

I gave him a cigarette, took one myself, and lighted them with a stick from the fire.

He raised his face to the sky, said, "Raining again; let's go back to the house," but remained by the fire, staring at the cooking carcass. The stink of scorched meat hung thick around us.

"You don't take this very seriously yet, do you?" he asked presently, in a low, matter-of-fact voice.

"It's a funny layout."

"He's cracked," he said in the same low voice.

"Try to see this. Honor meant something to him."

DASHIELL HAMMETT

That's why we had to trick him instead of bribing him, back in Cairo. Less than ten years of dishonor can crack a man like that. He'd go off and hide and brood. It would be either shoot himself when the blow fell—or that. I was like you at first." He kicked at the fire. "This is silly. But I can't laugh at it now, except when I'm around Miriam and the commodore. When he first showed up I didn't have the slightest idea that I couldn't handle him. I had handled him all right in Cairo. When I discovered I couldn't handle him I lost my head a little. I went down and picked a row with him. Well, that was no good either. It's the silliness of this that makes it bad. In Cairo he was the kind of man who combs his hair before he shaves, so his mirror will show an orderly picture. Can you understand some of this?"

"I'll have to talk to him first," I said. "He's staying in the village?"

"He has a cottage on the hill above. It's the first one on the left after you turn into the main road." Ringgo dropped his cigarette into the fire and looked thoughtfully at me, biting his lower lip. "I don't know how you and the commodore are going to get along. You can't make jokes with him. He doesn't understand them, and he'll distrust you on that account."

"I'll try to be careful," I promised. "No good offering this Sherry money?"

"Hell, no," he said softly. "He's too cracked for that."

THE FAREWELL MURDER

We took down the dog's carcass, kicked the fire apart, and trod it out in the mud before we returned to the house.

V

The country was fresh and bright under clear sunlight the next morning. A warm breeze was drying the ground and chasing raw-cotton clouds across the sky.

At ten o'clock I set out afoot for Captain Sherry's. I didn't have any trouble finding his house, a pinkish stuccoed bungalow with a terra cotta roof. reached from the road by a cobbled walk.

A white-clothed table with two places set stood on the tiled veranda that stretched across the front of the bungalow.

Before I could knock, the door was opened by a slim black man, not much more than a boy, in a white jacket. His features were thinner than most American negroes', aquiline pleasantly intelligent.

"You're going to catch colds lying around in wet roads," I said, "if you don't get run over."

His mouth-ends ran towards his ears in a grin that showed me a lot of strong yellow teeth.

"Yes, sir," he said, buzzing his s's, rolling the r, bowing. "The *capitaine* have waited breakfast that you be with him. You do sit down, sir. I will call him."

"Not dog meat?"

His mouth-ends ran back and up again and he shook his head vigorously.

"No, sir." He held up his black hands and counted the fingers. "There is orange and kippers and kidneys grilled and eggs and marmalade and toast and tea or coffee. There is not dog meat."

"Fine," I said, and sat down in one of the wicker arm-chairs on the veranda.

I had time to light a cigarette before Captain Sherry came out.

He was a gaunt tall man of forty. Sandy hair, parted in the middle, was brushed flat to his small head, above a sunburned face. His eyes were gray, with lower lids as straight as ruler-edges. His mouth was another hard straight line under a close-clipped sandy mustache. Grooves like gashes ran from his nostrils past his mouth-corners. Other grooves, just as deep, ran down his cheeks to the sharp ridge of his jaw. He wore a gayly striped flannel bathrobe over sand-colored pajamas.

"Good morning," he said pleasantly, and gave me a semi-salute. He didn't offer to shake hands. "Don't get up. It will be some minutes before Marcus has breakfast ready. I slept late. I had a most abominable dream." His voice was a deliberately languid drawl. "I dreamed that Theodore Kavalov's throat had been cut from here to here." He put bony fingers under his ears. "It was an atrociously gory business. He bled and screamed horribly, the swine."

I grinned up at him, asking:

"And you didn't like that?"

THE FAREWELL MURDER

"Oh, getting his throat cut was all to the good, but he bled and screamed so filthily." He raised his nose and sniffed. "That's honeysuckle somewhere, isn't it?"

"Smells like it. Was it throat-cutting that you had in mind when you threatened him?"

"When I threatened him," he drawled. "My dear fellow, I did nothing of the sort. I was in Udja, a stinking Moroccan town close to the Algerian frontier, and one morning a voice spoke to me from an orange tree. It said: 'Go to Farewell, in California, in the States, and there you will see Theodore Kavalov die.' I thought that a capital idea. I thanked the voice, told Marcus to pack, and came here. As soon as I arrived I told Kavalov about it, thinking perhaps he would die then and I wouldn't be hung up here waiting. He didn't, though, and too late I regretted not having asked the voice for a definite date. I should hate having to waste months here."

"That's why you've been trying to hurry it up?" I asked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"*Schrecklichkeit*," I said, "rocky skulls, dog barbecues, vanishing corpses."

"I've been fifteen years in Africa," he said. "I've too much faith in voices that come from orange trees where no one is to try to give them a hand. You needn't fancy I've had anything to do with whatever has happened."

"Marcus?"

DASHIELL HAMMETT

Sherry stroked his freshly shaven cheeks and replied:

"That's possible. He has an incorrigible bent for the ruder sort of African horse-play. I'll gladly cane him for any misbehavior of which you've reasonably definite proof."

"Let me catch him at it," I said, "and I'll do my own caning."

Sherry leaned forward and spoke in a cautious undertone:

"Be sure he suspects nothing till you've a firm grip on him. He's remarkably effective with either of his knives."

"I'll try to remember that. The voice didn't say anything about Ringgo?"

"There was no need. When the body dies, the hand is dead."

Black Marcus came out carrying food. We moved to the table and I started on my second breakfast.

Sherry wondered whether the voice that had spoken to him from the orange tree had also spoken to Kavalov. He had asked Kavalov, he said, but hadn't received a very satisfactory answer. He believed that voices which announced deaths to people's enemies usually also warned the one who was to die. "That is," he said, "the conventional way of doing it, I believe."

"I don't know," I said. "I'll try to find out for you. Maybe I ought to ask him what he dreamed last night, too."

"Did he look nightmarish this morning?"

THE FAREWELL MURDER

"I don't know. I left before he was up."

Sherry's eyes became hot gray points.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that you've no idea what shape he's in this morning, whether he's alive or not, whether my dream was a true one or not?"

"Yeah."

The hard line of his mouth loosened into a slow delighted smile.

"By Jove," he said, "that's capital! I thought—you gave me the impression of knowing positively that there was nothing to my dream, that it was only a meaningless dream."

He clapped his hands sharply.

Black Marcus popped out of the door.

"Pack," Sherry ordered. "The bald one is finished. We're off."

Marcus bowed and backed grinning into the house.

"Hadn't you better wait to make sure?" I asked.

"But I am sure," he drawled, "as sure as when the voice spoke from the orange tree. There is nothing to wait for now: I have seen him die."

"In a dream."

"Was it a dream?" he asked carelessly.

When I left, ten or fifteen minutes later, Marcus was making noises indoors that sounded as if he actually was packing.

Sherry shook hands with me, saying:

"Awfully glad to have had you for breakfast. Perhaps we'll meet again if your work ever brings you to northern Africa. Remember me to Miriam and Dolph. I can't sincerely send condolences."

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Out of sight of the bungalow, I left the road for a path along the hillside above, and explored the country for a higher spot from which Sherry's place could be spied on. I found a pip, a vacant ramshackle house on a jutting ridge off to the northeast. The whole of the bungalow's front, part of one side, and a good stretch of the cobbled walk, including its juncture with the road, could be seen from the vacant house's front porch. It was a rather long shot for naked eyes, but with field glasses it would be just about perfect, even to a screen of over-grown bushes in front.

When I got back to the Kavalov house Ringgo was propped up on gay cushions in a reed chair under a tree, with a book in his hand.

"What do you think of him?" he asked. "Is he cracked?"

"Not very. He wanted to be remembered to you and Mrs. Ringgo. How's the arm this morning?"

"Rotten. I must have let it get too damp last night. It gave me hell all night."

"Did you see Captain Cat-and-mouse?" Kavalov's whining voice came from behind me. "And did you find any satisfaction in that?"

I turned around. He was coming down the walk from the house. His face was more gray than brown this morning, but what I could see of his throat, above the v of a wing collar, was uncut enough.

"He was packing when I left," I said. "Going back to Africa."

THE FAREWELL MURDER

VI

That day was Thursday. Nothing else happened that day.

Friday morning I was awakened by the noise of my bedroom door being opened violently.

Martin, the thin-faced valet, came dashing into my room and began shaking me by the shoulder, though I was sitting up by the time he reached my bedside.

His thin face was lemon-yellow and ugly with fear.

"It's happened," he babbled. "Oh, my God, it's happened!"

"What's happened?"

"It's happened. It's happened."

I pushed him aside and got out of bed. He turned suddenly and ran into my bathroom. I could hear him vomiting as I pushed my feet into slippers.

Kavalov's bedroom was three doors below mine, on the same side of the building.

The house was full of noises, excited voices, doors opening and shutting, though I couldn't see anybody.

I ran down to Kavalov's door. It was open.

Kavalov was in there, lying on a low Spanish bed. The bedclothes were thrown down across the foot.

Kavalov was lying on his back. His throat had been cut, a curving cut that paralleled the line of his jaw between points an inch under his ear lobes.

DASHIELL HAMMETT

Where his blood had soaked into the blue pillow case and blue sheet it was purple as grape-juice. It was thick and sticky, already clotting.

Ringgo came in wearing a bathrobe like a cape.

"It's happened," I growled, using the valet's words.

Ringgo looked dully, miserably, at the bed and began cursing in a choked, muffled voice.

The red-faced blonde woman—Louella Qually, the housekeeper—came in, screamed, pushed past us, and ran to the bed, still screaming. I caught her arm when she reached for the covers.

"Let things alone," I said.

"Cover him up. Cover him up, the poor man!" she cried.

I took her away from the bed. Four or five servants were in the room by now. I gave the housekeeper to a couple of them, telling them to take her out and quiet her down. She went away laughing and crying.

Ringgo was still staring at the bed.

"Where's Mrs. Ringgo?" I asked.

He didn't hear me. I tapped his good arm and repeated the question.

"She's in her room. She—she didn't have to see it to know what had happened."

"Hadn't you better look after her?"

He nodded, turned slowly, and went out.

The valet, still lemon-yellow, came in.

"I want everybody on the place, servants, farm hands, everybody downstairs in the front room,"

THE FAREWELL MURDER

I told him. "Get them all there right away, and they're to stay there till the sheriff comes."

"Yes, sir," he said and went downstairs, the others following him.

I closed Kavalov's door and went across to the library, where I phoned the sheriff's office in the county seat. I talked to a deputy named Hilden. When I had told him my story he said the sheriff would be at the house within half an hour.

I went to my room and dressed. By the time I had finished, the valet came up to tell me that everybody was assembled in the front room—everybody except the Ringgos and Mrs. Ringgo's maid.

I was examining Kavalov's bedroom when the sheriff arrived. He was a white-haired man with mild blue eyes and a mild voice that came out indistinctly under a white mustache. He had brought three deputies, a doctor and a coroner with him.

"Ringgo and the valet can tell you more than I can," I said when we had shaken hands all around. "I'll be back as soon as I can make it. I'm going to Sherry's. Ringgo will tell you where he fits in."

In the garage I selected a muddy Chevrolet and drove to the bungalow. Its doors and windows were tight, and my knocking brought no answer.

I went back along the cobbled walk to the car, and rode down into Farewell. There I had no trouble learning that Sherry and Marcus had taken the two-ten train for Los Angeles, the afternoon

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before, with three trunks and half a dozen bags that the village expressman had checked for them.

After sending a telegram to the Agency's Los Angeles branch, I hunted up the man from whom Sherry had rented the bungalow.

He could tell me nothing about his tenants except that he was disappointed in their not staying even a full two weeks. Sherry had returned the keys with a brief note saying he had been called away unexpectedly.

I pocketed the note. Handwriting specimens are always convenient to have. Then I borrowed the keys to the bungalow and went back to it.

I didn't find anything of value there, except a lot of fingerprints that might possibly come in handy later. There was nothing there to tell me where my men had gone.

I returned to Kavalov's.

The sheriff had finished running the staff through the mill.

"Can't get a thing out of them," he said. "Nobody heard anything and nobody saw anything, from bedtime last night, till the valet opened the door to call him at eight o'clock this morning, and saw him dead like that. You know any more than that?"

"No. They tell you about Sherry?"

"Oh, yes. That's our meat, I guess, huh?"

"Yeah. He's supposed to have cleared out yesterday afternoon, with his black man, for Los Angeles. We ought to be able to find the work in that. What does the doctor say?"

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"Says he was killed between three and four this morning, with a heavyish knife—one clean slash from left to right, like a left-handed man would do it."

"Maybe one clean cut," I agreed, "but not exactly a slash. Slower than that. A slash, if it curved, ought to curve up, away from the slasher, in the middle, and down towards him at the ends—just the opposite of what this does."

"Oh, all right. Is this Sherry a southpaw?"

"I don't know." I wondered if Marcus was. "Find the knife?"

"Nary hide nor hair of it. And what's more, we didn't find anything else, inside or out. Funny a fellow as scared as Kavalov was, from all accounts, didn't keep himself locked up tighter. His windows were open. Anybody could of got in them with a ladder. His door wasn't locked."

"There could be half a dozen reasons for that. He——"

One of the deputies, a big-shouldered blond man, came to the door and said:

"We found the knife."

The sheriff and I followed the deputy out of the house, around to the side on which Kavalov's room was situated. The knife's blade was buried in the ground, among some shrubs that bordered a path leading down to the farm hands' quarters.

The knife's wooden handle—painted red—slanted a little toward the house. A little blood was smeared on the blade, but the soft earth had

cleaned off most. There was no blood on the painted handle, and nothing like a fingerprint.

There were no footprints in the soft ground near the knife. Apparently it had been tossed into the shrubbery.

"I guess that's all there is here for us," the sheriff said. "There's nothing much to show that anybody here had anything to do with it, or didn't. Now we'll look after this here Captain Sherry."

I went down to the village with him. At the post office we learned that Sherry had left a forwarding address: General Delivery, St. Louis, Mo. The postmaster said Sherry had received no mail during his stay in Farewell.

We went to the telegraph office, and were told that Sherry had neither received nor sent any telegrams. I sent one to the Agency's St. Louis branch.

The rest of our poking around in the village brought us nothing—except we learned that most of the idlers in Farewell had seen Sherry and Marcus board the southbound two-ten train.

Before we returned to the Kavalov house a telegram came from the Los Angeles branch for me:

Sherry's trunks and bags in baggage room here not yet called for are keeping them under surveillance.

When we got back to the house I met Ringgo in the hall, and asked him:

"Is Sherry left-handed?"

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He thought, and then shook his head.

"I can't remember," he said. "He might be. I'll ask Miriam. Perhaps she'll know—women remember things like that."

When he came downstairs again he was nodding:

"He's very nearly ambidextrous, but uses his left hand more than his right. Why?"

"The doctor thinks it was done with a left hand. How is Mrs. Ringgo now?"

"I think the worst of the shock is over, thanks."

VII

Sherry's baggage remained uncalled for in the Los Angeles passenger station all day Saturday. Late that afternoon the sheriff made public the news that Sherry and the black were wanted for murder, and that night the sheriff and I took a train south.

Sunday morning, with a couple of men from the Los Angeles police department, we opened the baggage. We didn't find anything except legitimate clothing and personal belongings that told us nothing.

That trip paid no dividends.

I returned to San Francisco and had bales of circulars printed and distributed.

Two weeks went by, two weeks in which the circulars brought us nothing but the usual lot of false alarms.

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Then the Spokane police picked up Sherry and Marcus in a Stevens Street rooming house.

Some unknown person had phoned the police that one Fred Williams living there had a mysterious black visitor nearly every day, and that their actions were very suspicious. The Spokane police had copies of our circular. They hardly needed the H. S. monograms on Fred Williams' cuff links and handkerchiefs to assure them that he was our man.

After a couple of hours of being grilled, Sherry admitted his identity, but denied having murdered Kavalov.

Two of the sheriff's men went north and brought the prisoners down to the county seat.

Sherry had shaved off his mustache. There was nothing in his face or voice to show that he was the least bit worried.

"I knew there was nothing more to wait for after my dream," he drawled, "so I went away. Then, when I heard the dream had come true, I knew you johnnies would be hot after me—as if one can help his dreams—and I—ah—sought seclusion."

He solemnly repeated his orange-tree-voice story to the sheriff and district attorney. The newspapers liked it.

He refused to map his route for us, to tell us how he had spent his time.

"No, no," he said. "Sorry, but I shouldn't do it. It may be I shall have to do it again some time, and it wouldn't do to reveal my methods."

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He wouldn't tell us where he had spent the night of the murder. We were fairly certain that he had left the train before it reached Los Angeles, though the train crew had been able to tell us nothing.

"Sorry," he drawled. "But if you chaps don't know where I was, how do you know that I was where the murder was?"

We had even less luck with Marcus. His formula was:

"Not understand the English very good. Ask the *capitaine*. I don't know."

The district attorney spent a lot of time walking his office floor, biting his finger nails, and telling us fiercely that the case was going to fall apart if we couldn't prove that either Sherry or Marcus was within reach of the Kavalov house at, or shortly before or after, the time of the murder.

The sheriff was the only one of us who hadn't a sneaky feeling that Sherry's sleeves were loaded with assorted aces. The sheriff saw him already hanged.

Sherry got a lawyer, a slick looking pale man with hornrim glasses and a thin twitching mouth. His name was Schaeffer. He went around smiling to himself and at us.

When the district attorney had only thumb nails left and was starting to work on them, I borrowed a car from Ringgo and started following the railroad south, trying to learn where Sherry had left the train. We had mugged the pair, of course, so I carried their photographs with me.

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I displayed those damned photographs at every railroad stop between Farewell and Los Angeles, at every village within twenty miles of the tracks on either side, and at most of the houses in between. And it got me nothing.

There was no evidence that Sherry and Marcus hadn't gone through to Los Angeles.

Their train would have put them there at ten-thirty that night. There was no train out of Los Angeles that would have carried them back to Farewell in time to kill Kavalov. There were two possibilities: an airplane could have carried them back in plenty of time; and an automobile might have been able to do it, though that didn't look reasonable.

I tried the airplane angle first, and couldn't find a flyer who had had a passenger that night. With the help of the Los Angeles police and some operatives from the Continental's Los Angeles branch, I had everybody who owned a plane—public or private—interviewed. All the answers were no.

We tried the less promising automobile angle. The larger taxicab and hire-car companies said, "No." Four privately owned cars had been reported stolen between ten and twelve o'clock that night. Two of them had been found in the city the next morning: they couldn't have made the trip to Farewell and back. One of the others had been picked up in San Diego the next day. That let that one out. The other was still loose, a Packard sedan. We got a printer working on post card descriptions of it.

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To reach all the small-fry taxi and hire-car owners was quite a job, and then there were the private car owners who might have hired out for one night. We went into the newspapers to cover these fields.

We didn't get any automobile information, but this new line of inquiry—trying to find traces of our men here a few hours before the murder—brought results of another kind.

At San Pedro (Los Angeles's seaport, twenty-five miles away) a negro had been arrested at one o'clock on the morning of the murder. The negro spoke English poorly, but had papers to prove that he was Pierre Tisano, a French sailor. He had been arrested on a drunk and disorderly charge.

The San Pedro police said that the photograph and description of the man we knew as Marcus fit the drunken sailor exactly.

That wasn't all the San Pedro police said.

Tisano had been arrested at one o'clock. At a little after two o'clock, a white man who gave his name as Henry Somerton had appeared and had tried to bail the negro out. The desk sergeant had told Somerton that nothing could be done till morning, and that, anyway, it would be better to let Tisano sleep off his jag before removing him. Somerton had readily agreed to that, had remained talking to the desk sergeant for more than half an hour, and had left at about three. At ten o'clock that morning he had reappeared to pay the black man's fine. They had gone away together.

The San Pedro police said that Sherry's photo-

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graph—without the mustache—and description were Henry Somerton's.

Henry Somerton's signature on the register of the hotel to which he had gone between his two visits to the police matched the handwriting in Sherry's note to the bungalow's owner.

It was pretty clear that Sherry and Marcus had been in San Pedro—a nine-hour train ride from Farewell—at the time that Kavalov was murdered.

Pretty clear isn't quite clear enough in a murder job: I carried the San Pedro desk sergeant north with me for a look at the two men.

"Them's them, all righty," he said.

VIII

The district attorney ate up the rest of his thumb nails.

The sheriff had the bewildered look of a child who had held a balloon in his hand, had heard a pop, and couldn't understand where the balloon had gone.

I pretended I was perfectly satisfied.

"Now we're back where we started," the district attorney wailed disagreeably, as if it was everybody's fault but his, "and with all those weeks wasted."

The sheriff didn't look at the district attorney, and didn't say anything.

I said:

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"Oh, I wouldn't say that. We've made some progress."

"What?"

"We know that Sherry and the dinge have alibis."

The district attorney seemed to think I was trying to kid him. I didn't pay any attention to the faces he made at me, and asked:

"What are you going to do with them?"

"What can I do with them but turn them loose? This shoots the case to hell."

"It doesn't cost the county much to feed them," I suggested. "Why not hang on to them as long as you can, while we think it over? Something new may turn up, and you can always drop the case if nothing does. You don't think they're innocent, do you?"

He gave me a look that was heavy and sour with pity for my stupidity.

"They're guilty as hell, but what good's that to me if I can't get a conviction? And what's the good of saying I'll hold them? Damn it, man, you know as well as I do that all they've got to do now is ask for their release and any judge will hand it to them."

"Yeah," I agreed. "I'll bet you the best hat in San Francisco that they don't ask for it."

"What do you mean?"

"They want to stand trial," I said, "or they'd have sprung that alibi before we dug it up. I've an idea that they tipped off the Spokane police them-

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selves. And I'll bet you that hat that you get no *habeas corpus* motions out of Schaeffer."

The district attorney peered suspiciously into my eyes.

"Do you know something that you're holding back?" he demanded.

"No, but you'll see I'm right."

I was right. Schaeffer went around smiling to himself and making no attempt to get his clients out of the county prison.

Three days later something new turned up.

A man named Archibald Weeks, who had a small chicken farm some ten miles south of the Kavalov place, came to see the district attorney. Weeks said he had seen Sherry on his—Weeks's—place early on the morning of the murder.

Weeks had been leaving for Iowa that morning to visit his parents. He had got up early to see that everything was in order before driving twenty miles to catch an early morning train.

At somewhere between half-past five and six o'clock he had gone to the shed where he kept his car, to see if it held enough gasoline for the trip.

A man ran out of the shed, vaulted the fence, and dashed away down the road. Weeks chased him for a short distance, but the other was too speedy for him. The man was too well-dressed for a hobo: Weeks supposed he had been trying to steal the car.

Since Weeks's trip east was a necessary one, and during his absence his wife would have only their two sons—one seventeen, one fifteen—there with

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her, he had thought it wisest not to frighten her by saying anything about the man he had surprised in the shed.

He had returned from Iowa the day before his appearance in the district attorney's office, and after hearing the details of the Kavalov murder, and seeing Sherry's picture in the papers, had recognized him as the man he had chased.

We showed him Sherry in person. He said Sherry was the man. Sherry said nothing.

With Weeks's evidence to refute the San Pedro police's, the district attorney let the case against Sherry come to trial. Marcus was held as a material witness, but there was nothing to weaken his San Pedro alibi, so he was not tried.

Weeks told his story straight and simply on the witness stand, and then, under cross-examination, blew up with a loud bang. He went to pieces completely.

He wasn't, he admitted in answer to Schaeffer's questions, quite as sure that Sherry was the man as he had been before. The man had certainly, the little he had seen of him, looked something like Sherry, but perhaps he had been a little hasty in saying positively that it was Sherry. He wasn't, now that he had had time to think it over, really sure that he had actually got a good look at the man's face in the dim morning light. Finally, all that Weeks would swear to was that he had seen a man who had seemed to look a little bit like Sherry.

It was funny as hell.

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The district attorney, having no nails left, nibbled his finger-bones.

The jury said, "Not guilty."

Sherry was freed, forever in the clear so far as the Kavalov murder was concerned, no matter what might come to light later.

Marcus was released.

The district attorney wouldn't say good-by to me when I left for San Francisco.

IX

Four days after Sherry's acquittal, Mrs. Ringgo was shown into my office.

She was in black. Her pretty, unintelligent, Oriental face was not placid. Worry was in it.

"Please, you won't tell Dolph I have come here?" were the first words she spoke.

"Of course not, if you say not," I promised and pulled a chair over for her.

She sat down and looked big-eyed at me, fidgeting with her gloves in her lap.

"He's so reckless," she said.

I nodded sympathetically, wondering what she was up to.

"And I'm so afraid," she added, twisting her gloves. Her chin trembled. Her lips formed words jerkily: "They've come back to the bungalow."

"Yeah?" I sat up straight. I knew who *they* were.

"They can't," she cried, "have come back for any reason except that they mean to murder Dolph

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as they did father. And he won't listen to me. He's so sure of himself. He laughs and calls me a foolish child, and tells me he can take care of himself. But he can't. Not, at least, with a broken arm. And they'll kill him as they killed father. I know it. I know it."

"Sherry hates your husband as much as he hated your father?"

"Yes. That's it. He does. Dolph was working for father, but Dolph's part in the—the business that led up to Hugh's trouble was more—more active than father's. Will you—will you keep them from killing Dolph? Will you?"

"Surely."

"And you mustn't let Dolph know," she insisted, "and if he does find out you're watching them, you mustn't tell him I got you to. He'd be angry with me. I asked him to send for you, but he—" She broke off, looking embarrassed: I supposed her husband had mentioned my lack of success in keeping Kavalov alive. "But he wouldn't."

"How long have they been back?"

"Since the day before yesterday."

"Any demonstrations?"

"You mean things like happened before? I don't know. Dolph would hide them from me."

"I'll be down to-morrow," I promised. "If you'll take my advice you'll tell your husband that you've employed me. but I won't tell him if you don't."

"And you won't let them harm Dolph?"

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I promised to do my best, took some money away from her, gave her a receipt, and bowed her out.

Shortly after dark that evening I reached Farewell.

X

The bungalow's windows were lighted when I passed it on my way uphill. I was tempted to get out of my coupé and do some snooping, but was afraid that I couldn't out-Indian Marcus on his own grounds, and so went on.

When I turned into the dirt road leading to the vacant house I had spotted on my first trip to Farewell, I switched off the coupé's lights and crept along by the light of a very white moon overhead.

Close to the vacant house I got the coupé off the path and at least partly hidden by bushes.

Then I went up on the rickety porch, located the bungalow, and began to adjust my field glasses to it.

I had them partly adjusted when the bungalow's front door opened, letting out a slice of yellow light and two people.

One of the people was a woman.

Another least turn of the set-screw and her face came clear in my eyes—Mrs. Ringgo.

She raised her coat collar around her face and hurried away down the cobbled walk. Sherry stood on the veranda looking after her.

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When she reached the road she began running uphill, towards her house.

Sherry went indoors and shut the door.

I took the glasses away from my eyes and looked around for a place where I could sit. The only spot I could find where sitting wouldn't interfere with my view of the bungalow was the porch-rail. I made myself as comfortable as possible there, with a shoulder against the corner post, and prepared for an evening of watchful waiting.

Two hours and a half later a man turned into the cobbled walk from the road. He walked swiftly to the bungalow, with a cautious sort of swiftness, and he looked from side to side as he walked.

I suppose he knocked on the door.

The door opened, throwing a yellow glow on his face, Dolph Ringgo's face.

He went indoors. The door shut.

My watch-tower's fault was that the bungalow could only be reached from it roundabout by the path and road. There was no way of cutting cross-country.

I put away the field glasses, left the porch, and set out for the bungalow. I wasn't sure that I could find another good spot for the coupé, so I left it where it was and walked.

I was afraid to take a chance on the cobbled walk.

Twenty feet above it, I left the road and moved as silently as I could over sod and among trees,

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bushes and flowers. I knew the sort of folks I was playing with: I carried my gun in my hand.

All of the bungalow's windows on my side showed lights, but all the windows were closed and their blinds drawn. I didn't like the way the light that came through the blinds helped the moon illuminate the surrounding ground. That had been swell when I was up on the ridge getting cock-eyed squinting through glasses. It was sour now that I was trying to get close enough to do some profitable listening.

I stopped in the closest dark spot I could find—fifteen feet from the building—to think the situation over.

Crouching there, I heard something.

It wasn't in the right place. It wasn't what I wanted to hear. It was the sound of somebody coming down the walk towards the house.

I wasn't sure that I couldn't be seen from the path. I turned my head to make sure. And by turning my head I gave myself away.

Mrs. Ringgo jumped, stopped dead still in the path, and then cried:

"Is Dolph in there? Is he? Is he?"

I was trying to tell her that he was by nodding, but she made so much noise with her *Is he's* that I had to say "Yeah" out loud to make her hear.

I don't know whether the noise we made hurried things up indoors or not, but guns had started going off inside the bungalow.

You don't stop to count shots in circumstances like those, and anyway these were too blurred

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together for accurate score-keeping, but my impression was that at least fifty of them had been fired by the time I was bruising my shoulder on the front door.

Luckily, it was a California door. It went in the second time I hit it.

Inside was a reception hall opening through a wide arched doorway into a living-room. The air was hazy and the stink of burnt powder was sharp.

Sherry was on the polished floor by the arch, wriggling sidewise on one elbow and one knee, trying to reach a Luger that lay on an amber rug some four feet away. His upper teeth were sunk into his lower lip, and he was coughing little stomach coughs as he wriggled.

At the other end of the room, Ringgo was upright on his knees, steadily working the trigger of a black revolver in his good hand. The pistol was empty. It went snap, snap, snap, snap foolishly, but he kept on working the trigger. His broken arm was still in the splints, but had fallen out of the sling and was hanging down. His face was puffy and florid with blood. His eyes were wide and dull. The white bone handle of a knife stuck out of his back, just over one hip, its blade all the way in. He was clicking the empty pistol at Marcus.

The black boy was on his feet, feet far apart under bent knees. His left hand was spread wide over his chest, and the black fingers were shiny with blood. In his right hand he held a white bone-handled knife—its blade a foot long—held it,

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knife-fighter fashion, as you'd hold a sword. He was moving toward Ringgo, not directly, but from side to side, obliquely, closing in with shuffling steps, crouching, his hand turning the knife restlessly, but holding the point always towards Ringgo. Marcus's eyes were bulging and red-veined. His mouth was a wide grinning crescent. His tongue, far out, ran slowly around and around the outside of his lips. Saliva trickled down his chin.

He didn't see us. He didn't hear us. All of his world just then was the man on his knees, the man in whose back a knife—brother of the one in the black hand—was wedged.

Ringgo didn't see us. I don't suppose he even saw the black. He knelt there and persistently worked the trigger of his empty gun.

I jumped over Sherry and swung the barrel of my gun at the base of Marcus's skull. It hit. Marcus dropped.

Ringgo stopped working the gun and looked surprised at me.

"That's the idea; you've got to put bullets in them or they're no good," I told him, pulled the knife out of Marcus's hand and went back to pick up the Luger that Sherry had stopped trying to get.

Mrs. Ringgo ran past me to her husband.

Sherry was lying on his back now. His eyes were closed.

He looked dead, and he had enough bullet holes in him to make death a good guess.

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Hoping he wasn't dead, I knelt beside him—going around him so I could kneel facing Ringgo—and lifted his head up a little from the floor.

Sherry stirred then, but I couldn't tell whether he stirred because he was still alive or because he had just died.

"Sherry," I said sharply. "Sherry."

He didn't move. His eyelids didn't even twitch.

I raised the fingers of the hand that was holding up his head, making his head move just a trifle.

"Did Ringgo kill Kavalov?" I asked the dead or dying man.

Even if I hadn't known Ringgo was looking at me I could have felt his eyes on me.

"Did he, Sherry?" I barked into the still face.

The dead or dying man didn't move.

I cautiously moved my fingers again so that his dead or dying head nodded, twice.

Then I made his head jerk back, and let it gently down on the floor again.

"Well," I said, standing up and facing Ringgo, "I've got you at last."

XI

I've never been able to decide whether I would actually have gone on the witness stand and sworn that Sherry was alive when he nodded, and nodded voluntarily, if it had been necessary for me to do so to convict Ringgo.

I don't like perjury, but I knew Ringgo was guilty, and there I had him.

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Fortunately, I didn't have to decide.

Ringgo believed Sherry had nodded, and then, when Marcus gave the show away, there was nothing much for Ringgo to do but try his luck with a plea of guilty.

We didn't have much trouble getting the story out of Marcus. Ringgo had killed his beloved *capitaine*. The black boy was easily persuaded that the law would give him his best revenge.

After Marcus had talked, Ringgo was willing to talk.

He stayed in the hospital until the day before his trial opened. The knife Marcus had planted in his back had permanently paralyzed one of his legs, though aside from that he recovered from the stabbing.

Marcus had three of Ringgo's bullets in him. The doctors fished two of them out, but were afraid to touch the third. It didn't seem to worry him. By the time he was shipped north to begin an indeterminate sentence in San Quentin for his part in the Kavalov murder he was apparently as sound as ever.

Ringgo was never completely convinced that I had suspected him before the last minute when I had come charging into the bungalow.

"Of course I had, right along," I defended my skill as a sleuth. That was while he was still in the hospital. "I didn't believe Sherry was cracked. He was one hard, sane-looking scoundrel. And I didn't believe he was the sort of man who'd be worried much over any disgrace that came his way.

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I was willing enough to believe that he was out for Kavalov's scalp, but only if there was some profit in it. That's why I went to sleep and let the old man's throat get cut. I figured Sherry was scaring him up—nothing more—to get him in shape for a big-money shakedown. Well, when I found out I had been wrong there I began to look around.

"So far as I knew, your wife was Kavalov's heir. From what I had seen, I imagined your wife was enough in love with you to be completely in your hands. All right, you, as the husband of his heir, seemed the one to profit most directly by Kavalov's death. You were the one who'd have control of his fortune when he died. Sherry could only profit by the murder if he was working with you."

"But didn't his breaking my arm puzzle you?"

"Sure. I could understand a phoney injury, but that seemed carrying it a little too far. But you made a mistake there that helped me. You were too careful to imitate a left-hand cut on Kavalov's throat; did it by standing by his head, facing his body when you cut him, instead of by his body, facing his head, and the curve of the slash gave you away. Throwing the knife out the window wasn't so good, either. How'd he happen to break your arm? An accident?"

"You can call it that. We had that supposed fight arranged to fit in with the rest of the play, and I thought it would be fun to really sock him. So I did. And he was tougher than I thought,

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tough enough to even up by snapping my arm. I suppose that's why he killed Mickey too. That wasn't on the schedule. On the level, did you suspect us of being in cahoots?"

I nodded.

"Sherry had worked the game up for you, had done everything possible to draw suspicion on himself, and then, the day before the murder, had run off to build himself an alibi. There couldn't be any other answer to it: he had to be working with you. There it was, but I couldn't prove it. I couldn't prove it till you were trapped by the thing that made the whole game possible—your wife's love for you sent her to hire me to protect you. Isn't that one of the things they call ironies of life?"

Ringgo smiled ruefully and said:

"They should call it that. You know what Sherry was trying on me, don't you?"

"I can guess. That's why he insisted on standing trial."

"Exactly. The scheme was for him to dig out and keep going, with his alibi ready in case he was picked up, but staying uncaught as long as possible. The more time they wasted hunting him, the less likely they were to look elsewhere, and the colder the trail would be when they found he wasn't their man. He tricked me there. He had himself picked up, and his lawyer hired that Weeks fellow to egg the district attorney into not dropping the case. Sherry wanted to be tried and acquitted, so he'd be in the clear. Then he had me by the neck. He

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was legally cleared forever. I wasn't. He had me. He was supposed to get a hundred thousand dollars for his part. Kavalov had left Miriam something more than three million dollars. Sherry demanded one-half of it. Otherwise, he said, he'd go to the district attorney and make a complete confession. They couldn't do anything to him. He'd been acquitted. They'd hang me. That was sweet."

"You'd have been wise at that to have given it to him," I said.

"Maybe. Anyway I suppose I would have given it to him if Miriam hadn't upset things. There'd have been nothing else to do. But after she came back from hiring you she went to see Sherry, thinking she could talk him into going away. And he lets something drop that made her suspect I had a hand in her father's death, though she doesn't even now actually believe that I cut his throat.

"She said you were coming down the next day. There was nothing for me to do but go down to Sherry's for a showdown that night, and have the whole thing settled before you came poking around. Well, that's what I did, though I didn't tell Miriam I was going. The showdown wasn't going along very well, too much tension, and when Sherry heard you outside he thought I had brought friends, and—fireworks."

"What ever got you into a game like that in the first place?" I asked. "You were sitting pretty enough as Kavalov's son-in-law, weren't you?"

"Yes, but it was tiresome being cooped up in

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that hole with him. He was young enough to live a long time. And he wasn't always easy to get along with. I'd no guarantee that he wouldn't get up on his ear and kick me out, or change his will, or anything of the sort.

"Then I ran across Sherry in San Francisco, and we got to talking it over, and this plan came out of it. Sherry had brains. On the deal back in Cairo that you know about, both he and I made plenty that Kavalov didn't know about. Well, I was a chump. But don't think I'm sorry that I killed Kavalov. I'm sorry I got caught. I'd done his dirty work since he picked me up as a kid of twenty, and all I'd got out of it was damned little except the hopes that since I'd married his daughter I'd probably get his money when he died—if he didn't do something else with it."

They hanged him.

THE WITNESS IN THE
METAL BOX

By
Melville Davisson Post

I SHALL always remember this famous case.

To me there were romance and mystery and wonder in it. It stands out Homeric in my youthful fancy.

It was tried, as the lawyers say, before Judge Edmond Lewis and a jury, but it was tried, also, before Virginia. For the county came into that trial. The people filled the courtroom to the doors, crowded the county seat, and overran the taverns.

Old Edmond Lewis and his court, and the litigants and their attorneys, were, for the term of that trial, famous. They passed from the tavern to the courtroom through a lane of excited faces.

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Those who could not force a standing in the courtroom were at least determined to see the actors in the drama, even if they could not see the drama staged.

In this respect I had a great advantage.

My grandfather was a relative of Judge Edmond Lewis and I went in with him. I was a small boy, holding to my grandfather's hand. But I was old enough to understand the great event, and I missed nothing of its drama. We had a chair inside the court's railing by the judge's bench, where the lawyers and the officials were assembled.

There were famous men of Virginia in that courtroom.

Judge Edmond Lewis was a large figure in this portion of the commonwealth west of the mountains. There was something big and undisturbed about him, something almost Oriental in its immobility. He filled the huge arm-chair behind the judge's bench, and his very presence gave the proceedings in his court a serenity as of some majestic justice above the affairs of men, and of which he was, here, merely the vice regent.

And the litigants were romantic figures:

One could not look at Blackmer Harrington and at once withdraw the eye. The man held one's attention, he was so markedly the desperate adventurer; a tall, hawk-faced man in the maturity of life, with a cruel, relentless face that mirrored a will determined to go its way against any barrier. It was a face moving through adventure tales that are read in storybooks, sprawling by the fire; a

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face to sack a city, or to run a pirate ship in a boiling sea under the Jolly Roger!

It held me with a dreadful fascination.

And the other! One fell back on the storybooks in vain, to equal her. She came like a fairy thing from the city of Zeus, bringing the wonder of that city with her. For she had, in fact, come overseas from France to defend her inheritance in this court, and she brought into this frontier of Virginia the dress and the manner of that far-off, vaguely imagined land of elegant demeanor. This seems overdrawn for the truth, and I write it here with some misgivings. But it was the profound impression of my youthful fancy, and one cannot disentangle actuality from that golden glamour.

The case I knew thoroughly in detail, for I had heard it discussed in every direction before it came up in the court. It was the most important litigation of the time. There was a great estate to turn on the issue of it, and there was something more than that bare decision to stimulate one's interest.

The facts about the case were not involved:

The suit in itself was over the will of Alexander Harrington. It was supposed at the time that he had died intestate, leaving his great properties to pass by operation of law to his daughter, for he had no other child. This daughter had been sent for her education to France, and was there when her father died. But to the amazement of the county, this younger brother of Alexander came forward with a will leaving the estate to him, with some minor provisions for the daughter.

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It was a brief will on a single sheet of paper, written by the dead man, and signed after his manner, "A. Harrington," with an immense, intricate flourish under the signature. It was this signature that stamped it as authentic. That big arabesque of a scrawl could not be imitated. It was known to everybody. The deeds and contracts executed by the dead man and lodged about in the courts all bore that distinguishing evidence of the signature. There was no living man who could duplicate that scrawl.

Mr. Dabney Mason, the clerk of the circuit court, and an authority, held the thing impossible, and this was also the certain opinion of every scrivener in Virginia; that free-hand, intricate flourish, entangling itself below the name, was the sole artistry of the dead man. There could be no two opinions on that point. It was the signature of Alexander Harrington at the foot of this testament, and as it was thus a holograph will, it required no witnesses.

Harrington had endured no long illness at his death. He had been stricken in the fields at harvest, and had got down from his horse in the shade of an oak tree; from there, unconscious, he had been carried into his house. As the daughter was in France and there was no near relative but this younger brother, word of the illness was sent over the mountains and the man arrived. Alexander Harrington remained for some time in life, but only in periods of fitful consciousness.

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It was not known what talk the two men may have had together after the brother arrived, but this was hardly an important feature, as the will was of an earlier date. If it had been of this date, it would scarcely have stood before a jury: the incapacity of the testator was too apparent.

But the question did not come up. After Harrington's death, the brother called in some of the representative men of the county, and this will was found among the dead man's papers. It came, therefore, into the court with all the safeguards of the law about it and the required formalities to make it legal: a holograph will found among the important papers of the testator, in his possession, at his death.

It seemed no intricate case to try.

There was only the validity of the will to prove, and, after that, to meet whatever attack the contestant might bring up. And no one could see any firm ground for an attack. The stock ones in such cases could hardly be seriously urged: senility in the testator or undue influence. But who could be found to say that Alexander Harrington had any weakness of the mind? He was not advanced in age, and there was no abler man of business. And how could undue influence in this brother be even vaguely shadowed? He lived at a distance over the mountains, or went adventuring about the world, and the testator was here upon his estates.

There seemed no possible point of entry against the testament.

This was the consensus. But here was Colonel

Braxton appearing for the daughter, and the experts about the courtroom wagged their heads. One never knew the issue when this eccentric lawyer was involved—a gold eagle from the mint, assailed by him, would be in doubt!

It was not the case, it was the man behind it that perplexed the experts.

I remember my grandfather and old Edmond Lewis talking in the judge's room in the crowded tavern. They could see nothing here but the formalities of a trial. What could Braxton do, or any other lawyer? A jury might be moved in its emotions to the daughter's aid. But clearly there was no issue for a jury. There must be some evidence against the will for the jury to consider, exclusive of innuendoes and vague doubts.

Braxton knew this. But he was an enigma, even to the judges. What did the man have up his sleeve?

It was anterior to the time when judges were considered such feeble creatures that the facts of a case could not be talked of before them, and I have heard Judge Lewis state the facts in more than one involved matter, for my grandfather's comment. He cleared the brush out, as old Edmond used to say.

To me, on the morning of this trial, the scene was a thrilling thing.

The whole country was present, as though the hills and valleys had emptied themselves into the county seat. The crowd seemed to press in on the

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courthouse. Long before the court convened, the room was crowded. It was difficult for the sheriff to make a way for the court and the litigants to enter. I sat on a step of the judge's bench, beside my grandfather's chair, with a feeling of immense importance, as though I, too, were a part of this tremendous drama.

I overlooked no detail of that scene: the vast sea of faces, the jury in their chairs, the big, placid body of the judge leaning forward on the bench, and below him the clerk, Mr. Dabney Mason, dressed like a Bond Street print, in his English clothes. And the litigants and their attorneys! It was like a romance of Arthur. Who would win when they presently shocked together in this arena—this adventurer or this damsel in distress?

I cannot tell you how the thing thrilled me. There was a fascination about this Black-Sheep Harrington, as they used to call him, with his hawk face and his adventure legends; and his counsel, young Pennington Carlisle, was a model held up for us all; a brilliant, rising lawyer who filled the courthouse when he spoke. He had no equal before a jury, or before the people, when in a political campaign he took the stump in Virginia.

I had a sinking of the heart when I turned to the other lawyer's table.

What could this Colonel Braxton do for the lovely creature who sat beside him? A big man, like the judge, filling his chair, a handkerchief spread over his shirt front to screen it from the ash of his cigar; his eyes half closed, his body re-

laxed and inert, as thought it rested at ease after some exertion.

The man required to be awakened!

This was no time to drowse idly in a chair. I thought Destiny had mixed her figures. The adventurer with his ruthless face should have come in with this attorney, and the brilliant Carlisle should have championed the girl. This Colonel Braxton was no knight-errant for romance, unless—and I got a thrill with the idea—unless he were a magician appearing for a fairy princess. I hugged the notion with a consuming joy. That was it—a magician! And, in truth, to saner minds the absurd conception had a sort of color.

The lawyer had a small metal box on his table. And it was the only thing he had. Paper and law books cluttered the table before young Pennington Carlisle; cases from Virginia and the English courts, to refute every possible point that could be made against him, and he had witnesses waiting to be sworn: to establish the legal formalities about the will and to prove the signature of the testator.

But this Colonel Braxton had only his metal box!

The amazement in the thing reached beyond one small boy seated on a step of the judge's bench. It extended to the sea of faces; to the very officers of the court. What had this mysterious thing to do with the case at issue, this circular metal box sitting on a lawyer's table?

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The thing became more conspicuous when the clerk called the witnesses to be sworn. The adventurer stood up with the reputable citizens that Pennington Carlisle had called to establish the legal formalities about the will. They took the oath, and the judge turned to Colonel Braxton.

"Call your witnesses!" he said.

The lawyer took the smoldering cigar out of his mouth and laid it down carefully on the table. He looked vaguely about the courtroom as though it had, but now, come to his attention.

"I have no witnesses, Your Honor," he replied, "except the witness in this box . . . and I fear it cannot stand up to be sworn."

He put out his hand, touched the mysterious object beside him, and was silent.

That was all he said, and that was all we knew about his case.

I know that old Edmond Lewis, like every other man in that courtroom, was profoundly puzzled. He spoke of it with my grandfather. What was Braxton about with this confounded mystery? But my grandfather was equally in the dark.

I had a sense of a superior understanding of this thing.

I had got a light flashed on it in the drama of the courtroom: This Colonel Braxton was the magician out of a storybook. He would not be breaking lances with young Pennington Carlisle. He would entrap him with some enchantment. He had come in with his metal box to restore to the fairy princess her houses and her lands; and presently

we should see the working of his sorcery. I could hardly wait for the time to pass.

I alone understood the thing. And in a certain fashion I was right!

I watched the case move forward, from my place on the step of the judge's bench. And it was the opinion of the experts that Pennington Carlisle managed the thing with skill. He established the legal requirements about the will, to cover any attack on it from the point of its holograph requirements; the testament, itself, was already before the court. He proved the signature by the most reliable persons in the community. And then he put Blackmer Harrington on the stand.

His purpose, behind the legal pretension, was, in fact, to show the confidence of the testator in his brother, and to exclude any wonder at the bequest of the estate to him rather than to the daughter. He brought forward the fact that the claimant had for some years acted as the trusted agent of the dead man in the sale of wild lands east of the mountains.

Such lands were the principal subject of speculation at this time in Virginia. They were purchased in great surveys for a trifling sum and peddled out in small tracts to the settlers. Blackmer Harrington handled this business for his brother; had, in fact, exclusive control of it and—as Carlisle skillfully drew out—the complete confidence of the dead man, as shown by the options and power of attorney in blank sent to him to use as the requirements of these transactions de-

manded. The confidence of the testator in his brother was, in consequence, evident beyond question.

The motive for the testament was more difficult to disclose. It was not Carlisle's intention to bring it out. He was too clever to do that. He would shadow it out vaguely, and let it lie, confident in the gossip and the imagination of the jury to supply what the lure of the idea required to fill it. His diplomatic instincts were sound here. But the horse he rode bolted.

The witness, once on the way, could not be pulled up. He elaborated the great aspect of his adventure; the lure that had won his brother to him; the plan to seize some islands in the West Indies and add them to the Republic. This estate was to be used to that magnificent end. That was the motive for the devise to him. Again and again he had laid the plans before his brother, and finally in the end had won him. It was a vast, splendid dream, that required, for reality, only funds and a man of courage.

Once seized, the American Government would annex the territory, and by that much the Republic would be advanced on its manifest destiny. As he warmed to his subject he grew more voluble. And the manner and the declaration of the man reached a certain element in the courtroom, and got a visible reaction. A vast empire extending itself into the sea fired their fancy. It had been a dream of the early men and it remained vaguely in their descendants.

And yet one could see Pennington Carlisle uneasy in his chair.

But he could not stop the thing that he had unwittingly set going. Finally he did break in to ask if the witness knew that the will had been executed. Harrington replied that he did not know it, until the will was found among his brother's papers after his death. He had convinced the dead man; but he did not know of that success until the testament was found.

And so Carlisle finally got his witness silenced.

My grandfather and Judge Lewis talked together gravely in the chamber behind the courtroom at the noon recess.

"Edmond," my grandfather said, "it will never do for Harrington to win this case. The wild fool will involve the country in a war, with some filibuster into the South or some piracy on the sea."

Judge Lewis stroked his big face with his hand.

"But what can I do?" he replied. "This intention is not an issue here. The sole issue is the validity of this will. What the prevailing litigant does with the estate he gains is not before me."

But my grandfather was not to be thus silenced.

"The welfare of the nation is before us all," he said. "What did Marshall do, or the great Virginia judges, when a doctrine of law threatened the whole people? The courts take their authority from the people, and in the ultimate exercise of that authority they must protect them."

"Yes," said Lewis, "'in the ultimate exercise of that authority.' But this is a trial court and not a

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court of last resort. If this feature of the case is to be considered, it is for the Supreme Court of Virginia to consider it. I cannot consider it."

"And they cannot consider it," replied my grandfather. "It will not be in the record, and so this dangerous fool will go out into the grainfields with his torch."

He stood up before the window, a tall, imperious old man with a grave, deep-lined face.

"In my father's house," he said, "there used to be a little circular glass window on which three names had been scratched with the diamond setting of a ring; 'Aaron Burr,' 'Harman Blennerhassett,' and 'Daniel Davisson.' It was a meeting of conspirators; but my father, Daniel Davisson, was not one of them. Burr was a relative and a guest, but he told him the truth. 'You're an infernal fool,' he said, 'and Tom Jefferson will hang you!'"

He turned about to Judge Lewis.

"And here, Edmond, is another infernal fool that you ought to hang, instead of giving the creature a treasure chest and a letter of marque."

I understood even then, in my early youth, the magnitude of this discussion.

My grandfather saw the welfare of the whole country in this case and Judge Edmond Lewis saw the exact limitations of the law in it. Both were right, and even at this day I do not know which opinion should have prevailed. Here was the law as Judge Lewis saw it, confined to a single issue. It could not go beyond that issue. It was better to

look hardship in the face than to break down the rules of law—he saw that as clearly as Lord Eldon saw it.

They went back into the courtroom.

The same scene remained. But the case had now a larger meaning. What my grandfather had said to Judge Edmond Lewis had moved the whole drama up out of the mere adjustments of romance.

It had now a sort of national aspect.

I do not mean that the impending wrong, to the girl, sitting by her attorney, tugged any the less desperately at my heart. She was as entrancing as a dream, as a painted picture, and she was helpless before this blind stride of the law . . . unless the magician with his magic box could save her. . . .

What was in that box?

When Carlisle, for the will, finished with his case, Judge Lewis asked Colonel Braxton if he wished to cross-examine Harrington.

The big lawyer did not at once reply. He sat for some moments looking at the floor, as in reflection, idle and irrelevant to the matter at hand. Then he turned toward young Pennington Carlisle.

"I might ask him a question," he said.

The tone was gentle and apologetic, as though he were seeking a favor.

Carlisle laughed. "You have my permission, Colonel," he said.

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"Thank you, Pennington. It's just a little thing I wanted to know."

Carlisle thought he saw an opening for a check-mate, and he stepped into it.

"About the signature to the will, Colonel?"

Colonel Braxton looked up with wide-open eyes, as in utter astonishment.

"Oh, no," he said, "it's the dead man's signature."

"Undue influence then?"

"Oh, no!" Colonel Braxton's astonishment seemed to increase. "There was no undue influence about the making of this testament . . . no undue influence, Pennington."

"Incapacity in the testator?"

"Oh, no!" The words whined like a refrain in some absurd opera. "You couldn't believe that, Pennington; nobody could believe that . . . I couldn't make the jury believe that."

An aspect of victory enveloped Carlisle. He had, by the clever trick of drawing these admissions, covered his case to the wall; cut from under his opponent all the possible supports that could be set up in such a case. He had nothing more to fear!

"It's just a little thing I wanted to ask the witness—for my own information, Pennington," the big lawyer added.

Carlisle made a courteous, ironic gesture of assent. "I would waive almost any rule of evidence," he said, "in order to add to the information of this bar."

There was a ripple of suppressed laughter. And

Carlisle took his tribute with a triumphant smile. How could he know, in the arrogance of his visible victory, that he was trifling with disaster!

Colonel Braxton seemed not to realize the innuendo. "Thank you, Pennington," he said, and he turned to Harrington.

The adventurer, like his counsel, was in that pleasant mood of victory when one bears, in a genial fashion, with an irrelevant annoyance.

"I wanted to ask you," Colonel Braxton went on, "if you had ever seen a sodded field plowed?"

Everybody was astonished. What had the plowing of a sodded field to do with the issues of this case?

Carlisle's eyebrows lifted, and the witness smiled. "Why, yes, Colonel," Harrington replied; "when I was a boy on my father's estate, I have seen the negroes plow the pasture land."

"Then," continued the lawyer, "you can tell me what happens when the plow crosses a small, narrow, sodded ditch."

The witness replied that if the ditch were small and narrow the plow would jump it, leaving the sod at the bottom of the ditch undisturbed.

Colonel Braxton nodded in assent.

"Ah, yes," he said. "I thought that would be true. . . . I'm not much of a farmer. . . . I wanted to be certain."

That courtroom was full of persons who were very much farmers, and they were beyond doubt certain. The witness was precisely correct.

"Then," the lawyer went on, "it is always pos-

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sible to tell whether such a small, narrow ditch or depression was present in the sodded field before it was plowed, or made after it was plowed?"

The witness replied that this was surely true, because, if it were made after the plowing, it would be in the broken ground, but if it existed before the plowing, the plow would jump it, and the undisturbed sod would remain at the bottom of the ditch or depression across the entire field.

"Ah . . . yes," Colonel Braxton reflected in his gentle drawl. "But I'm not much of a farmer . . . and I wanted to be certain."

He sat down.

We were all certain. But what had this simple illustration of the plow to do with the contestant's case?

Old Edmond Lewis was no less puzzled than the lad on the step of his bench below him. I think he would have ruled out this irrelevant inquiry if Carlisle had asked it. But to Carlisle, in his security, this idle discussion of husbandry was of no importance. And, so far as we could see, he was clearly right.

The whole courtroom was astonished.

It was incredible. . . . It was beyond belief; but the case was ended. Here was Harrington leaving the witness chair. Here was Colonel Braxton gone back to his chair. Here was Carlisle on his feet, making his motion to exclude the evidence and direct a verdict.

The case was ended!

It was a rout . . . a debacle!

Judge Lewis turned to Colonel Braxton. He seemed to move heavily, like a man under pressure. And when he spoke, his voice was harsh:

"Do you wish to be heard on this motion?"

"No." The big lawyer was now standing up.

"Then you admit the validity of the will?"

"The will," replied Colonel Braxton, "is a forgery."

The tension on everybody in that courtroom was tremendous.

"A forgery!" exclaimed the judge. "You have introduced no evidence of forgery."

"The evidence," replied Colonel Braxton, "is on the face of the paper itself. But it takes a good eye to see it, and, in consequence, I have sent to Baltimore for the best eye that could be purchased."

The man had changed. The leisure aspect had vanished; the stoop of the shoulders; the drawl in the voice.

He opened the metal box on his table and took out a big lens.

He got the will from the clerk.

"The signature is genuine," he said, "but the writing above the signature is forged. The signature was on this paper before the writing was added, and one does not sign his name first, and then after that, write his will above it.

"Look, Your Honor." He carried the papers and the lens across to the judge's bench and put them down before him. "This paper has been folded a number of times. These folds are across

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the signature, and extend from it under the body of this writing. And look, Your Honor, how the illustration of the plow on the sodded field parallels the pen on the field of this sheet of paper. When the sheet of paper was flat and unbroken by the folds, the pen ran smooth with no break in its furrow, as in the lettering and the scroll of this signature. But in the body of this writing above the signature, wherever the pen came to a crease of the fold, it jumped it, precisely as the plow jumps a narrow ditch, and it left the paper unmarked at the bottom of the fold precisely as the plow left the sod untouched at the bottom of the ditch. This signature was written when the sheet of paper was flat, and the writing above it after the sheet was folded."

Judge Edmond Lewis stooped over the paper with the lens in his big hand. Then he beckoned to my grandfather, went down to Carlisle's table, and called the jury.

The whole court crowded around him.

And there, under the magnification of the lens, lay the story of the forgery, so clear that the simplest man could see it. Carlisle saw it, and he was appalled. His client had taken one of the powers of attorney sent him, signed in blank by his brother, for it was folded like a letter, and above that signature he had traced this will, and lodged it among the dying man's papers when he came to attend him at his death. It was all there, standing out on the white field under the magnification of the lens.

It was tremendous.

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The whole sea of faces packed into the courtroom was alight with victory. But there was no sound.

I stood up with a wild beating of the heart.

The magician had won for the fairy princess!
And I looked to see the big figure of the lawyer
vanish in some shattering wonder that would split
the courtroom.

UP THE SPOUT

By
Gelett Burgess

HE SAT in the corner of the Brookline trolley car reading a newspaper. You might have taken him for a rather knowing college youth, or even a shrewd young bank clerk. His eyes perhaps were just a bit too near together, and his mouth a trifle hard; but he had by even nice girls—in California, that is, he had just come East—been considered very good looking.

It was rather difficult, though, to get a good look at Mr. Glasher; he kept his face pretty well hidden by the newspaper. When out on business, he disliked being conspicuous. In his dark blue suit, of a rather “snappy” tailoring, and flat-brimmed fedora, Mr. Glasher prided himself upon looking

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like a gentleman; and he almost did. His gloves, you know. His cane, hooked over one arm. It was a rather curious cane, though, had you inspected it closely. At the end of the curved handle of that stout, stylish Malacca stick there was a little sharp spike sticking out about a quarter of an inch. It was his own invention, and Mr. Glasher was a bit proud of it. He had brought it to Boston for a purpose.

When Mr. Glasher, toward midnight, had entered the car, at Boylston Street, he had found only a portly Negro lolling in a far corner, and in the center a young lady so pretty that any other young man would probably have sat down opposite her.

Mr. Glasher, however, never put pleasure before business. He admired that beautiful young blonde in black (though he had a secret opinion that all blondes were mercenary), but his first glance had gone to her hands. She had her gloves off that hot June evening, in her lap. No one would have suspected, though, that young Mr. Glasher had so much as noticed the splendid ring she wore. In these days of audacious, scintillating mock splendor, though, it was hard, even for an expert like Mr. Harry Glasher, to tell at that distance whether it was a natural or synthetic diamond.

The car rolled on. The girl gazed dreamily out of the window. The Negro snored. Mr. Glasher planned his evening's activities.

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All at once there was a scream from the lady. A crash! The Negro howled. A terrifying, swift, scraping, rending, shattering devastation. Mr. Glasher had jumped up swearing softly with splintered glass flying all about him. When the car stopped, the heavy bootlegger truck which had sidewiped it was making off at sixty miles an hour.

Mr. Glasher's hand had gone, instinctively to his temple.

The excited young lady had jumped up, also. "Oh, are you hurt! she exclaimed. "Why, you're bleeding!" Already she had snatched a tiny lacy handkerchief from her bag.

Now the last thing Mr. Glasher desired that night, or any night, was to be marked for identification by a visible wound. "Oh, it's nothin', Miss, thank you. Never mind me, Miss."

Paying no heed to his protestation, she had pulled off his hat. Deftly, she applied the handkerchief to his temple and tied it on with a pink ribbon jerked out from her silk underslip.

"There!" she patted it, "that will do till you can get to a drug store and have it properly treated."

Although the girl was pretty enough to turn any man's head, he had scarcely looked at her face, even when it was so very near his own. He was ready to swear, now, though, was Mr. Glasher, that the diamond on her finger was genuine.

Then, looking up at the solicitous conductor.

"Aw, ferget it," he said. "Never mind my name.

Not two bits' worth of harm done. I should worry about a scratch like that!"

The company, though, in case of accident, always insisted upon having names and addresses. The little blonde watched her handsome patient interestedly, awaiting his reluctant reply. There came to Mr. Glasher a name he had seen that day in Boston, it was on the sign of an undertaker.

"Lionel Tarkington," he said, "Copley Square Hotel."

The little blonde seemed to approve.

"I'd like *your* name, too, Miss, as a witness, if you don't mind," the conductor said, deferentially.

"Oh, dear, I *do* hope I won't have to testify in court!" she exclaimed. "But still, if it will help this gentleman any, why, I'm May Smith, No. 304 Clarenby Road, Brookline."

It was almost equivalent to an introduction. At least, Miss Smith appeared to think so. She sat down, and smiled up at Mr. Glasher with an abandon almost Californian. Reluctantly he took the seat beside her. His whole evening, he feared, was spoiled.

"Oh, I do hope you're not badly hurt, Mr.—Mr. Tarkington. Are you by any chance any relation to the——"

"Brother," said Mr. Glasher. He thought she meant the undertaker.

"Really? Why, how *wonderful* to have met you!"

Mr. Glasher gave her a puzzled look. By this time he was intensely annoyed. He was wondering

if he could pull his hat down far enough to hide the cut on his forehead, or would he have to abandon his program for to-night.

"Does it pain you very much, Mr. Tarkington?"

"Nothin' at all, Miss; don't mind me. I'm all right, thanks. I've cut myself worse shavin', many's the time."

The car was slowing up. The little blonde had glanced out of the window. Suddenly she grasped his arm.

"Oh—oh, will you do me a *great* favor, Mr. Tarkington?" She was speaking rapidly. "Get out here with me, won't you, please, just as if you knew me. Right away, quick. I'll explain later."

Mr. Glasher was used to moving quickly, at the slightest hint. On leaving the car they brushed past a couple coming in—a thin, highly painted girl in red, staring at them with hot black eyes, accompanied by a large, lazyish young man, in a sporty checked suit with a fat face and a yellow mustache.

On the sidewalk, after the car had gone, "Friend of yours, Miss?" he asked.

"He was, once" she said, "but I'm awfully disappointed in him though. That is—we had a—oh, well—he did something I didn't like, exactly, you know, and I broke it off. I simply couldn't stand being in that car with him, after what has happened. I'm awfully obliged to you, Mr. Tarkington. Suppose we take the next car."

The rest of the ride to Brookline rather bored Mr. Glasher. It was always an effort for him, in

his rare upper-class contacts, to avoid slang and a south-of-Market-Street accent.

When he got off the car with her, Miss Smith held out her ungloved hand. "Good night," she said. "I'm *so* glad to have met you, Mr. Tarkington; awfully glad! You've been *so* interesting."

She didn't seem to realize that Mr. Glasher's hand was lingering in hers, fingering her ring in a way that might be construed as almost affectionate. Mr. Glasher had glanced left and right. No one in sight. The ring was a little loose on her finger. How about giving a jerk, and then making a get-away?

"I shall be *so* anxious to know if you're all right, Mr. Tarkington." She hesitated. "You have my address, you know, haven't you? Come and see me some time, if you like." Then she suddenly removed her hand, embarrassed at her own boldness—"Well, *good* night, Mr. Tarkington!"

Mr. Glasher looked after her and her ring, regretfully, and then set out for his walk. People sit up so late, nowadays, that he had plenty of time. Besides, being fresh from the West, Brookline was new to him, and he was a man who always enjoyed looking about a bit. Mr. Glasher was a keen observer.

Toward half-past two he came upon a house that he rather fancied the looks of. It was a two-and-a-half-story residence, set back from the street, beyond a lawn spotted with lovely, big shady trees. Mr. Glasher, as was his custom, first made sure that there were no inquisitive passers-by, and then

he vaulted a wall and skirted a hedge separating the place from its next-door neighbor. Daintily as a Russian dancer, from tree to tree, he approached the house. No lights were visible. He stood a while for all the world like one of those cast-iron statues there on the lawn, listening. Then he removed the bandage from his head.

In a reëntrant corner of the house wall there was a very convenient drain pipe. In Frisco, which he had hurriedly left for Frisco's good, they had called Mr. Glasher "Harry the Cat." It took him but a few acrobatic moments to get up to the level of the second story. The nearest window, however, was beyond hand-reach. Here was where his cane came in handy. He reached up and across with it, and caught the sharp spiked end of the curved handle in the window lintel. It held firm. Then he let go his hold on the pipe and swung gracefully over like a pendulum, deftly catching his foot on the window sill. The sash of the window was raised. He tied a black silk handkerchief picturesquely round the lower part of his face. Then in went Mr. Glasher, leaving his cane dangling outside.

A swift flash round of his electric torch. A double bed—empty. A woman's room. On rubber-soled feet he slipped over and opened the top bureau drawer and fumbled amongst handkerchiefs, gloves and more handkerchiefs. Ran his finger into a pin.

Then Mr. Glasher grew suddenly tense. Voices!

GELETT BURGESS

Coming up stairs, evidently. Like a cat, Mr. Glasher dropped, crawled under the bed.

The door opened. Two young women, talking, entered.

Mr. Glasher, when the room was lighted, could see only legs and feet, moving about.

"*Did* he propose to you, or didn't he?" That was Fat Legs.

"Oh, he will, all right. Give him time," said Thin Legs.

Fat Legs laughed ironically. They had already begun to undress.

"Oh, gee, such a time to-night, Lou! My head's going round yet." A shoe fell. "Say, who d'you think we ran into to-night? May Smith!"

Mr. Glasher, under the bed: "May Smith! Always a May Smith, somewheres. Must be thousands of 'em in California alone."

"Red as a beet, May was," Thin Legs yawned on, "when she saw us."

"I don't know why May should worry. Didn't she throw him over?"

"Why, *he* says he let her go himself." A giggle. "She's too vegetarian, he says. Say, she was with a queer little squirt, Lou. Wonder where she picked him up."

Mr. Glasher's motto was: I bide my time!

"May Smith never picked anybody up Gert, and you know it. She's got money enough to get anybody she wants, anyway."

Mr. Glasher could see pink silken things being dropped on the floor, something blue, too.

UP THE SPOUT

"Say, what d'you know, Lou? He showed me one of May Smith's letters to-night. Had a whole bunch of 'em in his pocket."

"Better look out what *you* put on paper, then, Gert, if he's that kind!"

"Say, May certainly can write a hot-baby letter, all right, believe *me*! Pretty good line she's got, I'll say. And say, Lou, what d'you think she called him in that letter—'Tommo.' Isn't that sickening? Oh, you 'Tommo'!" A long yawn. "Gee, I'm sleepy! Hurry up, Lou, with that cold-creaming, and put out the light. I'm a dead fish."

Mr. Glasher was immensely relieved when the bed squeaked and sagged over his head. Presently he heard a sound that always delighted his heart—heavy, regular, stertorous breathing.

It wasn't long after that before he was lowering himself happily down by his cane, hooked into the window sill, to the window beneath. . . .

Mr. Glasher was a fast worker. The Boston papers, next day, described some half dozen calls he paid in Brookline, that night, with pronounced success. But there was one visit that wasn't reported.

It was toward three o'clock when Mr. Glasher, with some seventy-seven dollars in specie, his pockets full of jewelry and watches, a fat snoring broker's opal pin, a gold golf medal and a small silver cream pitcher marked "From Grandma," came to a lamp-post bearing the sign "Clarenby Road." Mr. Glasher stopped.

Clarenby Road? Mr. Glasher smiled. Oh, yes, the little yellow-haired jane who had bound up his head in the trolley car. He walked on more briskly. It was at No. 304 Clarenby Road that he stopped again and smiled. That big, vine-clad residence of tapestry brick, with its leaded casements, that conservatory and the half-timbered garage in the rear had an affluent look that greatly pleased him. Moreover, it had an eminently practical porch. For Mr. Glasher who, whether in prison or out, never failed to put in an hour a day on his physical exercises it was but a swift monkey-flight upward to that half-opened window.

Inside, he found himself at the end of a hall-way. Which of those doors, now, was the room of the little blonde doll with the diamond?

The flash-in of his electric torch showed a funny old lady asleep with her mouth open and her knees up. In that room Mr. Glasher didn't waste much time. He knew, by that noble mid-Victorian corset, and the curly switch on the dresser (with a lot of queer little things they used to call hair-pins), that there'd be nothing in there but coral and garnets and jet.

The next door. Guest room, probably. Neat and bare, arid. Nothing there but a smell of moth balls and furniture oil.

A butterfly alighting upon a rose—that was Mr. Glasher's touch upon the last door knob. Silently the door swung open. . . . The ticking of a tiny clock. A faint odor of violets . . . an almost inaudible sound of soft, regular breathing. . . .

UP THE SPOUT

For a good twenty seconds Mr. Glasher lingered at the foot of a dainty bed, permitting himself to regard, in the light of his torch, a lovely blonde head on the lace-edged beribboned pillow. He hadn't realized, in the trolley car, how terribly pretty she was. Then he noticed something that broke his brief moment of sentimentality. Her right hand, the same hand that he had so fondly held, was resting on the blue silk coverlid. And on her finger the diamond was flashing tempting messages in red and blue and yellow fires.

Mr. Glasher hesitated. The ring, he knew, was rather loose on that finger. But then—Mr. Glasher greatly disliked screaming at night. And violence, if you did happen to be pinched, had a very bad effect on the jury.

He sighed, and turned to the dressing table. He was biting into a short string of plump pearls to see if they could possibly be genuine when there occurred one of those accidents which will happen in the best-regulated burglaries.

In that suddenly illuminated room there had come a command, "Hold up your hands!"

Mr. Glasher, whirling, saw a very wide-awake, a very determined young lady in pink pajamas sitting upright in bed. She was pointing an automatic at him.

"Take off that black thing! And if you lower your hands, I'll—*oh! oh!* Good heavens! Why, it *is*—it's—why—why, aren't you Mr. Tarkington? What—what are you doing here?"

Mr. Glasher hesitated between the plaintive and the facetious.

"Why, Miss, you invited me yourself to come and see you, didn't you now, Miss? I just thought I'd drop in, you know." And he tried his best smile on her.

Miss Smith, though, with tightened lips, had already reached for the telephone, on a stand at the head of her bed, with a 1929 confidence in her nineteen years. "Well, I'll see that you don't drop in *again* for a while" she remarked. "It looks as if I'd have to testify in court after all."

Mr. Glasher, at such critical moments, could sometimes think quite quickly. Why, *could* it be —what if she were—he'd try it, anyway. He leaned forward as far as he dared.

"*Tommo!*" he whispered quite distinctly. And again, "*Tommo!*"

The girl paused, stared at him. "What's that?" Her face had gone blank.

Mr. Glasher was saying to himself, "Damned if it ain't a-goin' to work!" Then again whisperingly he cried, "Tommo, Tommo!" Still staring at him, she was, May Smith. "Well, if that ain't luck!" he thought, "she's the identical same May Smith that Thin Legs was talking about, after all!" He came out with it, now, recklessly, for that time of night, "*Dear Tommo!*"

"What d'you mean?" She held the receiver in her hand limply, apparently frightened for the first time.

"Your letters, Miss—your love letters. I thought . . ."

"What do *you* know about——"

"He's got 'em in his pocket, Tommo has, and he's reading 'em to Gert. Laughing at 'em. You know Gert, don't you, Miss?"

Miss Smith slowly replaced the receiver on the hook. "*My* letters . . . to Mr. McGivney? How in the world do *you* know?"

"Well, now, Miss, that's a professional secret, as the lawyers say. But I could git 'em for yer, Miss, I could, them love letters of yours to Mr. McGivney."

"What d'you mean? Don't you move, though! Keep your hands up, there. *How* could you get them?"

Mr. Glasher had a lovely, persuasive note in his voice, sometimes. "Couldn't I call on *him*, Miss, same as—same as I called on *you*? If you'd just be kind enough to give me his address, Miss——"

"Hush! Don't talk so loud! My aunt—but, my gracious, you couldn't possibly get in *there*! Mr. McGivney is a great big strong man. It would be very different than——"

"Oh, Miss, don't you worry! What did you say his address was, Miss?"

Now by what feminine sophistry that little blonde justified her compounding of a felony, that night, let no man ask. Ever since Eve in the Garden trafficked with Satan, women—Messalinas and Medicis, or Joneses and Smiths—have turned up their pretty noses at man-made law. When,

however, Mr. Glasher slid out of her window as smoothly, silently as tooth paste out of a tube, he had, to tell the truth, no very high, chivalrous notions of rescuing a beauteous damsel in distress—even though she had promised to leave the front door unlocked for him on his return, and to “do the right thing by him” if he got her the letters. What gave him that noble, elated air was merely his satisfaction at having cleverly got out of a pretty tight box.

But after all one house was as good as another to Mr. Glasher. And as he strolled on through one of the prettiest suburbs in the world why not have a try at McGivney’s, he thought, and see what he could pick up there? McGivney, when he had brushed by him, getting on the trolley car, had had a rather sporty, prosperous appearance. Looked like a good thing. Mr. Glasher seemed to recall, faintly, a horseshoe scarf pin . . . Red stones, weren’t they?

After having slipped ghost-like round to the rear of the McGivney house (where the blonde had said Tommo’s room was), Mr. Glasher first prudently located a line of retreat over a fence into the garden of a house on another street. Here he deposited his shoes. Then he proceeded to go up a convenient spout, using his hands and feet like a monkey, his cane hooked over his arm like a gentleman. To the nearest window he swung.

A bedroom again. Lord, how many strange bedrooms he had seen in his young life! In this lux-

urious chamber the bed was empty. Stale tobacco smoke. Where was friend Tommo? No clothes about. Not a watch or purse, not a cuff-link or scarf pin. On silk-stockinged feet Mr. Glasher tip-toed to the closet. With incredible swiftness he went through the pockets of several suits. Discovering nothing but a red poker chip, a Jack of Spades (bad luck), and a few crackly cigars, he emerged—only to find himself for the second time, that night, in a room far too bright for comfort.

Up went Mr. Glasher's hands, this time unasked. In the doorway he recognized at once the red-faced, slightly disheveled gentleman in a light, sporty checked suit as the fat, blond giant who had lumbered past him into the trolley car with Gert Thin Legs. Yes, he was right, too, about the horse-shoe scarf pin.

That ugly automatic, aimed at him so easily, brought back to Mr. Glasher's memory everything he had ever heard of Eastern penitentiaries. Mr. Glasher, nevertheless, spoke up with a bright, ingenuous smile: "Just a silly joke, pardner; that's all, honest. College boy fun, see? I ain't done no harm. Classmate of mine bet me ten dollars I couldn't get into this room alone."

"Well, son, I'll bet you ten dollars more you don't get *out* alone!"

Mr. McGivney had evidently been drinking; he was still in a genial humor.

Mr. Glasher's hat had fallen off, his black silk handkerchief was now round his neck.

"Where are your shoes?"

"Well now, I sure must 'pologize, pardner, lookin' this way. Fact is I'm havin' 'em half-soled an' heeled, an I ain't got another pair really fit to wear. Say," he grinned, "I wouldn't mind being in *your* shoes, pardner, right now!"

"You might have been in 'em at that, all right, if the fellows who came home with me had only left half an hour earlier. I'd have been in bed by now, and it would have been *you*, I s'pose, who'd be holding a gun on *me*."

"Not much! Never carry them kind of tools, myself," said Mr. Glasher. "I say, couldn't give a guy a chanst, could yer, pardner? I swear this is the first time I ever——"

"My first time, too, son," yawned McGivney, "and I don't intend to give away my first catch. You just walk on ahead of me, now!"

In the lower hall, Mr. Glasher thought it a pity that such a fine, rich, bass voice should want to say such extremely disagreeable things over a telephone.

"Gimme the Police Department, in a hurry! . . . Thomas McGivney, of No. 14 Eswold Street, speaking. . . . Say, listen, I've caught a burglar in my house, and I'm holding him for arrest." After hanging up, he smiled genially.

"Suppose we go into the reception room and get acquainted."

Big McGivney, in a very comfortable, deep leather chair, pointed with his pistol to a straight and very uncomfortable one for his guest. With a

ponderous deliberation that got on Mr. Glasher's sensitive nerves, McGivney poured himself out a generous highball with his left hand, and then lighted a perfecto with a gold lighter.

"Pretty good-looking guy, for a crook," said McGivney, grinning amiably. "Your picture will look grand in the newspapers, to-morrow."

"Oh, yes, I s'pose I'll have all sorts of swell dames writin' me letters an' wantin' to marry me probably. I say, pardner, though, you ain't so bad lookin' yourself when it comes right down to it. I'll bet *you* know a little thing or two about skirts, now—how about it?"

And as McGivney seemed rather pleased Mr. Glasher added, chummily, "Why, the last time I was in the pen, pardner—I was framed though, all right—they was a jane wrote to me every blessed day, damned if she didn't. Mash letters, pardner, so hot they ought to had asbestos envelopes goin' through the mails. Know what I mean?"

McGivney chuckled. "Sure, son, sure. I've seen plenty like that, too. Keep those hands up, though."

"She called me Harro, this jane did, pardner. Ain't that the limit for mush? My name's Harry, you know."

"That's funny." McGivney pouring another highball shakily. "Why, I knew a girl too, called me 'Tommo.' My name being Thomas, you know." He was smiling reminiscently, nodding.

"This skirt of mine, pardner—prettiest girl in Frisco—*she* was a blonde."

"Blonde is right," laughed McGivney, hic-coughing.

"No, honest, pardner? You don't say! Quite a quincidence, ain't it? I say, yours, now—she wa'n't a little one, was she? Blue eyes? Mine was. Talk about peaches—she was elected Queen of the Mission, on'y last year. Mary her name was. I called her May."

McGivney was laughing heavily, now, choking. "Damn' funny thing, son, but my girl was named Mary, too, and I called *her* May." He patted his breast pocket. "Got a bunch of her letters right here. Swift literature, all right, believe *me!* Just been reading 'em to the boys here to-night."

And then the front doorbell rang. McGivney hoisted himself out of his chair. "Harro and Tommo—Mary and May!" still chuckling thickly. "Pretty rich!" He knocked over a glass. His pistol had dropped a careless inch or so.

Like a Rocky Mountain wildcat Mr. Glasher sprang at him, his hand catching McGivney's wrist in a grip of steel. One savage, jiu-jitsu twist, and he had swung the hilarious fat man sidewise to the floor howling with pain. Mr. Glasher, on top of him in an instant, was hammering his skull scientifically with the pistol butt.

The doorbell again. Ringing. Ringing. Impatient voices outside.

Mr. Glasher now worked very accurately, very fast. From Tommo's pockets he deftly removed several objects. His own black silk handkerchief he tied neatly round Tommo's mouth. From the

hat rack in the hall he tossed a golf cap down beside the unconscious form. The bell ringing, ringing, ringing. Then he rumbled his hair, and pretending a breathless excitement threw open the front door.

"There he is! Just had a little trouble with him, Officer." As it was the first time in his life that he had ever been politely saluted by a policeman Mr. Glasher was using his high-school English. "He tried to jump me at the last minute, and I had to biff him a little on the head. Nasty brute, all I could do to manage him y'know."

"Are you Mr. McGivney, sir?"

"Right you are, Officer. He got in through the front window over the porch. I had sat up rather late in a little game with some friends to-night, see? I was just taking off my shoes. Lucky I had a gun handy."

One of the policemen was bending over McGivney, feeling his heart.

Mr. Glasher became extra bland: "Oh, I say, Officer, the wife's upstairs, half scared to death. You know how women are. If you don't mind, I'll just run up and calm her down a bit."

"That's all right, Mr. McGivney; we can handle him all right. Just 'phoning for an ambulance. You sure laid him out cold, sir!"

In the upper hall were two long-haired women, white as their night-gowns, clinging terrified to each other in a doorway. At the sight of Mr. Glasher they both screamed. With an extremely

ungentlemanly push he swept them back into the room and slammed the door.

"It's all right, darling," he shouted, "it's all right. Yes, they've come. Yes, the police have come, darling. I ain't hurt a bit. Don't cry, dear!"

Into McGivney's room, snatching his hat, out McGivney's window slipped Mr. Glasher, caning himself down to the back yard.

In a quiet, lovely, tree-lined street, a safe distance away, he sat down on a low wall to put on his shoes.

Mr. Glasher, however, was somewhat disappointed with his recent visit. "Hell! Only six dollars!" he muttered. "Boys must have cleaned McGivney out, to-night, in that poker game." He spent some time curiously examining the red stones (yes, rubies, all right) in a magnificent horseshoe scarf pin. "Well, I hope this damn' thing will bring *me* better luck to-night than it did *him*!"

Fifteen minutes later Mr. Glasher in a brightly lighted room. Mr. Glasher standing at the foot of a familiar dainty bed. But this time Mr. Glasher had no fear. Weren't they pals, now? Hadn't she left the front door unlocked for him? "Must 'ave given me up, though; she's asleep, all right." Mr. Glasher contemplating a pretty figure rolled up in a be-rosebudded crêpe de Chine thing lying on the outside of that bed.

From the blue silk coverlid he deftly removed to his hip pocket an automatic pistol which had been relinquished by her relaxed fingers. Mr.

UP THE SPOUT

Glasher never took unnecessary chances, even with a pal. Mr. Glasher meanwhile had kept his eyes on something that you, perhaps, might not have expected to see still there on her finger, flashing red and blue and yellow.

To say that Mr. Glasher, though, was surprised to find that her diamond hadn't safely been put away would be doing him a gross injustice. Mr. Glasher's life had led him to take a most contemptuous view of the intelligence of the money classes.

Mr. Glasher now became conscious of blue eyes staring up at him. Mr. Glasher had all the vanity of the clever crook. He rather relished the admiration in those blue eyes for his skill and daring.

He wasn't at all surprised, either—once those seventeen heliotrope "Dear Tommo" letters were in her hands, were safe in her bureau drawer—to see that little blonde stand before him with her big baby blue eyes almost ready for tears. Why, it was *awful*, you know, what he had done. Now she came to think of it, it was perfectly *terrible*, really, Mr. Tarkington! And now she wanted to do the right thing by him.

Mr. Glasher put out a firm hand. "Oh, no, Miss, I really couldn't take it, Miss. I couldn't think of it, honest!"

She smiled like an angel. "No, *please* take it! I shall be awfully offended if you don't, *really*, Mr. Tarkington!"

Mr. Glasher gently removed the crisp greenback from her hand. He laid it on her dressing table. "Oh, no, Miss, no, I only wanted to do you a

favor, see, Miss—because you was so nice to me, you know, and—and you're so terrible pretty."

Somehow, he had hold of her hand, now. Mr. Glasher was smiling his handsomest. "Honest to God, Miss, if you ain't the prettiest girl that ever I see! *Terrible* pretty!"

Mr. Glasher recognized that frightened-delighted look in her fascinated blue eyes. Well he knew that vague, half-hearted attempt to push him away. "Oh, no, no—really you *mustn't*!" she was whispering. "No, don't, *please*!" But Mr. Glasher jolly well knew, too, how very good-looking he was. His arm had slid boldly round her waist. "*Terrible* pretty!"

"Speak lower!" she whispered, "my aunt. . . ." Downstairs a clock striking, One, two, three, four! . . . a perfume of violets . . . her soft hair brushing his cheek . . . and while she was still faintly whispering, "No, you mustn't, really!" and still more faintly, "Why, the *idea*!" Mr. Glasher delicately, skillfully muffled her protests. . . . "Terrible pretty . . . terrible . . ." Rudolph Valentino could have done no better.

Suddenly Mr. Glasher froze.

"Put out the light," he whispered harshly; "somebody's moving out there in the hall! Your aunt! Quick into bed, afore they ketch me!"

On the street, with his gloves and his cane, in the cool refreshing flush of dawn, you would have taken Mr. Glasher for any suburbanite who had played poker so late that he was rather dreading

UP THE SPOUT

his greeting by the wife. He had gone half a mile, had Mr. Glasher, before he considered it discreet to pause under an electric light pole.

Mr. Glasher drew something from his vest pocket and held it up, smiling. Under the arc lamp it twinkled flashes of red and blue and yellow. He estimated the value of the diamond in that ring as at least a thousand dollars.

And as Mr. Glasher walked on, cockily twirling his stick, "Wanted to tip me five whole dollars for gittin' her bloomin' letters, did she? Bless her innocent little heart! Ain't that just like a blonde?"

RAMIKIN RUBIES

By

Clarence Budington Kelland

MR. RANDY HYDE

had not a high reputation among the business associates of his father—nor, for the matter of that, among his own contemporaries—for either acumen or industry. Everybody liked him, but nobody admired him. The newspapers, of course, doted upon him because every time there came a dull day they could focus on Randy and delight their readers with the latest escapade, or the newest fad, or the most recent rumor about this rich young man. He was news on the hoof.

If you are, say, twenty-three years old and if you own a billion dollars and if you are handsome and have a touch of what envious elders call ir-

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responsibility, you are a godsend to the press and to the public. All of which irked Randy until the great expedient presented itself.

This as all the world knows now, but as none of it knew then, was nothing more or less than the discovering of his double in the person of Mr. Smithfield Wagg, professor in a small Western college, who, nose for nose and eyelash for eyelash, was Randy's physical duplicate. That he was not Randy's mental duplicate was, perhaps, fortunate for all hands. For Mr. Wagg was of the most serious, of the most intellectual, of the most intolerant—and of the most unimaginative.

Now, an unimaginative person may be very dangerous if, by some miracle, he arrives at a point where he imagines. It becomes a serious seizure, and he is apt not to be able to distinguish between fact and figments of fancy.

Mr. Wagg commenced his professional career as a double by despising his employer and benefactor. His next step was to become convinced that he was far fitter to occupy Randy's position and administer his wealth for the benefit of humanity than Randy was. It became an obsession. Following that, it was not so difficult for him to imagine himself to be the man he impersonated so convincingly. And being a thorough, systematic person, he set to work to make their identities more identical.

It might—or it might not—have caused Randy to pause and consider, had he become aware how assiduously Smithfield Wagg labored over his

handwriting. Hours each day he spent at this task—with no definite purpose, it is true, but with some vague, unnamed purpose in the shaded corners of his peculiar mind. In the end, Mr. Wagg could write a letter or sign the name "Randy Hyde," and it would have required a superlative expert in the science of handwriting to detect the spurious and establish the true.

Also Mr. Wagg was vaguely becoming imbued with the obsession that he was intrusted with a mission. Not even to himself did he state this mission in terms, but gradually he accepted it tacitly. This mission was, undoubtedly, to maneuver his life so adroitly that upon some unnamed date he could cast off the habiliments of the double and step into the identity of his employer—to the end that the greatest fortune in the world should be administered by himself for the good of the world, but most especially for the benefit of that portion of the world which conceives the higher branches of human knowledge to be the chief end of man. Smithfield believed that man could attain the stature of the gods by dieting upon Einstein theories.

Meantime Randy Hyde, all unsuspecting what perils he nourished in his household, enjoyed his liberty jauntily and with abandon. He left Smithfield Wagg to stand in the public eye while he nosed into nooks and crannies. He sent Smithfield to wearisome social functions while he acquainted himself with a world of which he had only dreamed. He compelled Wagg to attend the meet-

ings of boards and conferences with lawyers, while he himself picked posies in pastures where Randy Hyde would never be permitted to browse.

He chuckled at the thought of private detectives guarding Mr. Wagg 'with their very lives while he adventured about the earth unattended. He laughed aloud as he read in the papers the goings and comings of Smithfield, the theories of Smithfield, and most of all, the love affair—if it could be called a love affair—of Mr. Wagg and Miss Anna Spack. He even endured the gibes of his friends with equanimity, for it entertained him mightily to watch the progress of this innocent amour. Miss Spack was the complement of Mr. Wagg spiritually and intellectually; fortunately, Mr. Wagg had no attention to give to the purely physical. This, doubtless, was a miracle wrought by Nature in her determined effort that every human shall find a mate.

At any rate, while press and public and society busied themselves with the putative romance between the young billionaire and the very plain social secretary, Randy availed himself of the smoke screen and found the universe a fascinating playground.

Randy Hyde was reading a book—an occupation of which he was capable—when Smithfield Wagg entered the library in the full regalia of a gentleman who has been essaying society.

Randy glanced at him quizzically.

"I'm looking very well to-night," he said.

Mr. Wagg grunted morosely.

"But," qualified Randy, "my disposition needs spraying for vermin. What, may I ask, has joggled the well and favorably known aplomb?"

"An unpleasant interruption. An unnecessary interruption. A lack of consideration," said Mr. Wagg.

"You were at the merrymaking of Mrs. Huntley Jason, were you not?"

"I was not, as you know perfectly. I was in the home of the lady who is so fortunate as to employ Miss Anna Spack."

"Ah, one comprehends. And a tête-à-tête with the inamorata was disrupted?"

"Miss Spack and myself," said Mr. Wagg, "were discussing a certain phase of the prematrimonial customs of a tribe indigenous to Papua when we were broken in upon by an uproar."

"An uproar! You amaze me. Uproar in the salon of a leader of American society! And what, Waggy, caused the uproar—divorce, bridge, arson or a correspondent?"

"Merely theft," said Mr. Wagg disgustedly.

"One never knows what to expect nowadays. What, may one ask, was stolen and who was the thief?"

"Some bauble," said Mr. Wagg, "belonging to an objectionable and noisy woman named Rami-kin. A necklace, I believe."

Randy abandoned his indolent posture and sat erect. "You don't by any chance mean the Rami-kin rubies?" he asked.

"I heard rubies mentioned in the uproar," said

Mr. Wagg. "The Ramikin woman was exceedingly unpleasant and shrill. It was impossible to carry on coherently an intelligent conversation."

"And I missed it! I missed the theft of the Ramikin rubies! Of course you have no details. No, indeed. Your interest was elsewhere. Did robbers with weapons hold up the guests? Or what did happen?"

"I didn't inquire," said Mr. Wagg petulantly.

"Waggy, you ought to run a snooping column in a tabloid—you're so observing! An assassination would be nothing but a comma in your conversation. Well, thank God for the morning papers."

"By the way, you particularly requested me to observe if a Miss Patricia de Senlis was present. She was not."

"She never is," said Randy somewhat ruefully. Miss Patricia was becoming a major irritation. It was she who had been selected by his father's trustees to be the future Mrs. Hyde. Randy had been informed of plans for this alliance between two great fortunes by his personal counsel, Mr. Wanger, who urged matrimony upon him as a doctor might advise gargling the throat—as something which should be done for the good of all concerned. But all efforts to bring about a meeting between the young people had been futile, for both Randy and Miss Patricia were evasive.

She, it was said, was beautiful, but not without eccentricities. Her childhood—in fact, her entire life—had been spent abroad. Recently she had

returned to New York—to be seen by nobody who was entitled to see her. Whether she was in the city or whether she had vanished again into the mists of Europe, no one could say. She was reported to have gone to Vancouver and Vladivostok, to Peru and to Paris, to Milwaukee and Marseilles. Randy expostulated with Mr. Wanger.

“A man might as well set out to marry a clay pigeon,” he said. “I’m no matrimonial wing shot.”

“The young lady is difficult,” admitted Wanger, “but you, Randy, are not precisely docile.”

It was inevitable that Randy should be interested in a young woman whose photograph never had appeared in paper or magazine, and which neither bribery nor stealth could obtain for him; by a young woman surrounded by the glamour of mystery and eccentricity; who was reported to be beautiful in an elfin, piquant sort of way; who ignored him and the courtship of his trustees so utterly and effectively.

He was interested, intrigued, puzzled. But no more. Miss de Senlis was no sweetheart; she was a cross-word puzzle.

Randy shrugged his shoulders. “You are to attend a conference with my lawyers at ten o’clock to-morrow morning,” he said. “A tea in the afternoon, and Mrs. Pottsworth’s dinner in the evening. Those are my engagements for to-morrow.”

“They have been noted,” said Mr. Wagg.

“Pleasant dreams,” said Randy.

He read for a short time and then himself retired. In the morning—and this would have caused

a certain amount of astonishment in the minds of his trustees—he scrutinized certain confidential reports from various Hyde enterprises, for he was more interested in and had a greater intimate knowledge of his great affairs than any man dreamed. He lunched alone, attended a ball game in one of the more democratic seats, and then cast about him mentally for an evening's occupation.

His mood was that of a bad little boy playing hooky, and he was delighted with himself and with everything that came within range of his eyes and ears. Fifth Avenue always delighted him, and its windows never failed of glamorous interest. He loved to saunter along and look in at cravats, and pictures, and models of steamships, and gowns, and jewels, and pets. But window shopping was not his sole quest. Whenever he was abroad he kept his sharp eyes roving in search of a petite little figure with a decisive step and a piquant, lovely face. Randy had encountered her four or five times, and always in odd places or amid unusual circumstances. She never appeared when she might have been expected, but seemed always to present herself when it was utterly impossible that she should be within miles of the locality. Rather mysterious she was, exceedingly charming, a bit bewildering, but somehow stable and admirable and very dependably competent.

Miss Smith was not her name, but she had been presented to him as Miss Smith. She was friendly, almost encouraging at times, but never to the point of giving him her confidence. What her name

might really be, where she lived, what was her occupation—upon these points she was rather more than silent.

"If you wish to see me," she said more than once, "you must find me."

"But how shall I find you? You give me no clews."

"If you want to find me badly enough," she said with a sidewise smile, "you will manage."

It was she, of all the world, who had mastered his own secret and who knew unerringly which was Randy Hyde and which was Smithfield Wagg. This had disturbed him at first, but then he had become content.

"But why," she demanded, "do you want to find me? You, Randy Hyde, one of the richest young men in creation! What friendship is possible between you and myself? And you are nice! Oh, yes; you're that. And"—she appraised him with her eyes—"you look nice. What then? I open the door and let you into my life. To my own possible misery. Suppose I allowed myself to adore you." She shrugged her shoulders. "Then you would be compelled to marry somebody, and I would be left forlorn. No, thank you, I'm not taking any."

"Just because," he said, "I happen to be Randy Hyde, should I not have the same chance as any moderately respectable young man?"

"You should have, but circumstances won't let you. You're too important. Why, you have told

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me yourself they're trying to make you marry this Miss de Senlis."

"Whom I never have seen," he said. "And I have seen you. Mind, I'm not saying I'm in love with you. But you're quite the most interesting person I know, and the most thrilling company, and very lovely to look at. Besides which, I have a feeling that you would never let a fellow down. All I'm asking is the chance to see more of you and find out."

"Suppose we both found out?" she asked.

"Then," he said, "come wet, come dry; come hot, come cold; come hell or high water, I'd marry you if you'd have me."

"The impossible would remain the impossible," she said.

So she had compelled him to promise that he would never follow her from their chance meetings, nor would she make rendezvous with him. "Leave it to chance," she said. "I think I believe in fate. Or luck, or destiny. Either we will encounter each other again, or we won't. It must remain on the knees of the gods."

Hence it was that he always was watchful, and once in a blue moon his watchfulness was rewarded.

Now he walked westward through one of the more disreputable of the Forties, intending, perhaps, to drop into a motion-picture house for an hour before dinner. He crossed Sixth Avenue and was midway in the block when he saw her. She appeared from one of those iron-grilled doors which give under high steps upon the fronts of

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old, blank houses upon the northerly side of the street, and without a glance about her, walked with every appearance of haste toward Broadway.

Randy set out to overtake her, and so intent were his eyes upon her rapidly moving figure that he did not note the sudden interest of two loungers in her departure—two young men, sleek, dressed so exceedingly fashionably as to demonstrate that they were not gentlemen. They followed, speaking now and then from the corners of tight mouths.

Miss Smith hesitated at Broadway and cast a quick, anxious glance about her. Then she proceeded northward and entered suddenly a brightly lighted *rotisserie*, where she seated herself at a table visible from the street and—fortunately for Randy—otherwise unoccupied. He entered.

"It turns out," he said, "to be one of my golden days."

She started and then expelled a little breath of relief. "Oh," she exclaimed, "it's only you."

"Only," he said. "And may I dine with you off rotated fowl and such other bounties as the place provides?"

She closed her eyes for an instant, as if from great weariness of the sudden necessity to confront a decision. When she opened them again, they were dark and full of trouble. Almost he fancied he could read an appeal.

"I think," she said, "you would do well to go away—and quickly."

"Why?"

"This is no place for Randy Hyde," she said,

whispering his name. "This is no place for anybody. It's no place for me. Please go away."

"Something in the world," he said, "has gone cockeyed. A lady obviously in distress! Therefore I seat myself and await disclosures, if any."

She patted the back of one hand with the other. It was a troubled, anxious, almost frantic gesture.

"You must not stay." Then she hesitated. "It has the look of a rendezvous. I'm afraid the harm is done already."

"What harm, if one may ask?"

"Of being seen with me to-night."

"By whom?"

Her eyes, constantly upon the door, widened. The two immaculate young men entered without glancing at her and seated themselves at an opposite table.

"At any rate," Miss Smith breathed, "it is safe here. The lights, the street, the people, the window here! Nothing can happen here."

Randy calculated, "Which is why you came here? To protect yourself from something by making yourself conspicuous. This, young woman, hath a serious look. Also you regard those fashion plates with some apprehension. Do they enter into the scheme of things?"

"They followed me here," she said.

"Indeed. And is mashing indicated? Have I your permission, madame, to apply knuckles to noses? Do I behold the genus masher in his native habitat?"

"Mashers! I wish they were! Oh, please, Randy

Hyde, go away from here before—before something dreadful happens.” She leaned across the table and whispered: “Either one of those men would shoot you for the pleasure of it.”

Randy turned leisurely and surveyed the pair. He lifted his fine brows. “Gunmen, eh? At last! I’ve heard of the species, but never seen a copy. Have they guns with them, do you think?”

“I know,” she said.

“Odd—very odd! And what is your concern with the First and Second Murderer? It’s not in character. Why do these perilous persons dog your steps?”

“Of course you won’t go,” she said resignedly. “You’re that sort of idiot. Darn it! Darn almost everything. And here we are, and however we are going to get away I don’t know. We can’t sit here for days and days.”

“In the meantime we can eat,” he said, “and I might remind you the great metropolis retains and pays an extensive crew of policemen to protect its citizens. In fact, there is one of them staring in hungrily. If evil gunmen pursue virtuous beauty, it is the duty of the cop to put his foot down.”

“No, no! Anything but that! You don’t understand.”

“I confess it. I confess it freely. I am so far from understanding that I stand upon the threshold of bewilderment.” He leaned forward suddenly, his face grave and rather grim. “You’re in some mess—” he commenced, and then his elbow

encountered her hand bag, which lay upon the cloth. With a cry she clutched at it, but it slide over the edge and fell to the floor. Randy stooped to recover it and raised it from the floor, opened by its fall.

Open in his hand as he straightened himself—open under the brilliant lights which poured into the little bag and returned to astound his eyes with molten, ruddy splendor! He blinked, stared, and his lips closed in a teeth-bitten line. For there lay rubies—rubies and rubies! Instantly he knew them. A hundred times he had seen them before about the throat of the adipose Mrs. Ramikin. The stolen Ramikin rubies!

He closed the purse deliberately. "Well, well," he said. "So that's that."

She was pale now, and her eyes were fixed upon his, not in appeal but with some odd expression which he could not translate.

"That," she said, "is that. And what are you going to do about it?"

"First," he said gravely, "annex the swag—so." He dropped the bag into his side pocket. "Second, get you out of this predicament, whatever it is. Gosh," he exclaimed, "don't you know better than to be traipsing around with a few hundred thousand dollars' worth of stolen rubies? Some idiot might misconstrue."

"And you—don't you misconstrue?"

"Why, no. Not exactly. Not with your eyes and your ears—what I can see of them—and the way you walk. Not with your lips when they smile or

your brows when you are serious. Not with your chin and the way you carry your head. Not with all of you in ensemble. Oh, no. I don't misconstrue."

"What, then," she asked, "do you do?"

"I rally 'round," he said simply.

"Without explanations?"

"Mine not to reason why."

"They're stolen."

"To be sure."

"And in my possession."

"In mine," he said. "Which proves a person can be in possession of stolen jewels, doesn't it, without having associated himself in the filching?"

"Either," she said, "you are tremendously dumb or——"

"Or?" he prompted.

"——big," she said—"bigger than I dreamed anyone could be."

"I'm so big I bulge," he said lightly. "Which brings us to the soup. It is not good soup, but nourishing. Soup stimulates the brain. I must figure out an adroitness. Oh, what a day! And it has happened to me!" He grinned delightedly. "Look out of the window. See all those people—millions of them. They're just people. They're going home to dinner. Think of it, there isn't one of them that has a stolen necklace of rubies in his pocket!"

"Nor," she said somewhat dryly, "two gunmen at his elbow."

"Ah, yes; the boys," he said.

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"They can't be sure I have them," said Miss Smith thoughtfully. "But they mean to find out."

"You haven't them," he said, "and we might as well attend to that feature of the program."

"What are you going to do?" she asked with sudden breathlessness.

"Amuse the children," he said, and got to his feet. He stepped across the café and bent genially over the two dapper young men with the pasty faces.

"Boys," he said confidentially, "I've got them. In the good old pocket. If you don't believe me, and if you'll promise not to be unmannerly and snatch, I'll show them to you."

They regarded him with eyes like the eyes of dead fish, and in spite of himself little chill ripples ran up and down his spine.

"Who are you?" one of them asked softly.

Randy made a gesture of one removing false whiskers and then, with the air of conferring a delightful surprise: "Hawkshaw, the detective," he said.

"He's a funny guy," one of them said to the other.

"He's comin' down sick," said the other.

"With bullet fever," said the first.

"So," said Randy, with the air of winding up a clinching argument, "the lady is out of it. Concentrate on me. Eh? From now on I'm the object ball. Do we agree?"

"He is funny," said one of the gunmen.

"See me laughin', don't you?" replied the other.

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Randy beamed on them a moment before he returned to his own table and seated himself. "Now," he said, "you may enjoy your dinner, and then be on your several ways about your lawful concerns. The boys, I take it, have set their hearts on me. When you have finished your sweet and coffee, you will arise, stroll nonchalantly out of this gilded palace and be seen no more."

"No," she said simply.

"Wrong answer."

She pondered. "Don't you want to know how I got the rubies?"

"Positively pop-eyed with curiosity," he said, "but innate good manners compel me to conceal it."

"I got them," she said, "from the most brilliant woman I have ever met."

"That," he said, with a chuckle, "is a confession you didn't remove them from Mrs. Ramikin."

"She," said Miss Smith, "is the greatest jewel thief in the world."

"Love to meet her," said Randy. "We often hear of them in my set, but seldom meet them socially."

"Her name," said Miss Smith, "is Sophia Brand. You'd like her tremendously," she said enthusiastically.

"I'm confident of it."

"She gave them to me."

"Charming. Like giving a friend a bomb with the fuse lighted."

"She gave them to me," said Miss Smith, "because she is going to retire."

"As a souvenir, I suppose, of her surrendered glories."

"No. To return to Mrs. Ramikin. Honestly. It would have been all right, only there were other people after them."

"The Ramikin rubies?"

"Yes; but Sophia took them right under their noses, and they were very angry about it."

"One understands their disgruntlement. And then?"

"They've tried to take them from Sophia."

"Who wished them on you?"

"No; when she found out they were watching the house, she giggled back. But I just took them and came away."

"And here we are."

"Exactly," she said.

"The police are barred."

"On Sophia's account, of course."

"You've finished your ice," observed Randy.

"I'm not going," she said firmly.

"Do you see that policeman staring in at the roast chicken with avid eye?"

"He is very visible, thank goodness."

"If you have not gone before I can count a hundred rapidly, I shall motion him in and earn him promotion by giving him the necklace. He'd be very grateful."

"You wouldn't!"

"I give you my word of honor," he said gravely.

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Miss Smith regarded him thoughtfully and nodded her head once in a quaint, jerky, delightful way.

"You win," she said.

"And some day soon you'll introduce me to this Sophia Brand? Promise."

"Perhaps," she said, "sooner than you imagine. But will they let me go?" She nodded toward the gunmen.

"I fancy so," he said. "Please be ready."

With that, he arose again and stepped to the other table.

"Boys," he said, "the young lady is leaving. She is out of the cast now. I'm staying to make it interesting for you, and I give you my sacred word the rubies are in my pocket." He turned his head. "Good night, Miss Smith," he called.

One of the gunmen stirred as if to arise, but Randy's hand rested heavily on his shoulder. "The policeman yonder would intervene in a common brawl," he suggested. "And if you stir a stump I shall unquestionably sock you just under the ear."

"Fellow," said the gunman through tight lips, "there's going to be slow music behind you that you won't hear."

"May I take my coffee with you?" Randy asked. "There's a vacant chair here." He did not wait for permission, but seated himself and beckoned the waiter. "Do you mind a few personal questions?" Randy asked brightly. "My besetting sin is curiosity and my experience is so limited. This, odd

as it may seem, is the first opportunity I have had of chatting with gentlemen of your calling."

The gunmen looked at each other in some bewilderment. They, too, were enjoying a novel experience, and they could not make out precisely what to do about it.

"For instance," Randy went on, "have you interesting names, such as Gyp the Blood and Chopper Charlie?"

"Aw, close your trap," directed one of his companions.

"Reticent," said Randy reproachfully, "and I so eager for friendship. Well, I must call you something. Now my name is Wagg—Smithfield Wagg for short. You"—he turned to the shorter of the men—"I shall mark Exhibit A and refer to as Dopey Dick, and you, sir"—to the other—"shall be Exhibit B, and your name for the occasion shall be Tim the Swag. Eh?"

The gunmen regarded each other once more with manifest discomfort. "He's blowed his top," said the shorter one, which, being translated from the idiom of trade, signified that Randy had taken leave of his senses.

"Kick in wit' the rubies," said the other out of the corner of his mouth, "and we'll forget you muscled into this deal."

"Do you," asked Randy, "carry your guns on springs in your sleeves, or do you shoot through the pocket, or are arm-pit holsters your choice?"

"He's shootin' off his mout'," observed the taller one.

"One more question," Randy said ingenuously: "Are you married, and do you, according to the stories, adore your wives and send your daughters to expensive finishing schools under *noms de guerre* such as Gwendolyn Gore-Quackenbush, and the like?"

"When this guy was born he'd lived too long already," observed the shorter one.

Randy rather wondered what to do next. There seemed a limit to the time he could sit at that table in comparative safety and hold his companions in light conversation. Sometime he would have to move, he would have to sally out upon the street, and it seemed well to have in mind some adroitness if he were to save the Ramikin rubies and possibly his own good health. At any rate, Miss Smith was well away, which to him was more than half the battle. He glanced through the plate glass at the street and discovered that half the battle was not won after all.

A taxicab drew up at the curb; as his eyes rested upon it, Miss Smith's face appeared for an instant in the window and her hand beckoned. Randy felt something of a thrill of elation. Much as he desired her to be at a distance and in safety, nevertheless his heart leaped at the knowledge that she was not the sort to absent herself and leave a friend to win his way out of a difficulty. Instead of escaping herself, she had set about instantly to devise a means of extricating him. That was sportsmanship.

He yawned and stretched his arms far apart—

not, perhaps, the most commendable table manners. The two gunmen sat with elbows on the cloth and heads close together after the secretive fashion of their kind, and Randy's eyes glinted with malicious humor as he yawned his spurious yawn and stretched his spurious stretch.

His hands came toward each other swiftly, until one rested upon the nape of the neck of each gangster. Then, with enthusiasm, he brought together those two heads with a most satisfying bump. It was a hearty bump, a bump with muscle behind it, and no expert bumper might find a criticism to offer.

While the pair were observing constellations and collecting their wits from what was to all intents and purposes a knock-out, Randy darted through the door, sprang across the walk and entered the waiting cab. The driver started instantly and Randy lurched back upon the seat.

"Miss Brand," said Miss Smith, exactly as if the presentation were being made in a drawing-room, "this is Mr. Wagg." Randy observed that Miss Smith played the game and protected his masquerade even in this emergency.

"You amateurs!" exclaimed a deep, pleasant voice, and in the dimness Randy could make out a slender woman of perhaps thirty, with handsome, intellectual, rather aristocratic features. "Amateurs and sentimentalists!"

Randy rattled the rubies. "If," he said, "I should be caught with these, I fancy I would lose my amateur standing."

"Already," said Sophia Brand, "you have between you quite ruined me professionally."

"Anyhow," Randy said harshly, "we're out of this mess."

"Yes?" asked Sophia.

"Looks so," said Randy.

"Then, young man, you would do well to look again. For instance, you might observe the car just behind us."

Randy nodded. "Of course, they would have kept a watch on you too."

"You have a modicum of intelligence," granted Sophia.

"Are you in command, or am I?" asked Randy.

"I," said Sophia, "have retired. In response to the exhortations of Miss Smith, I observe henceforward the convention of *meum* and *teum*. I am a lady who has no dealings with the so-called underworld. And I shall be very, very interested to see what you shall contrive."

Randy craned his neck to look at the pursuing car. "It contains," he said, "two gentlemen in addition to the driver."

"Two eminent gentlemen," agreed Sophia. "On the left you will see none other than Crazy Kane; on the right is Blinky Matthews. The driver is just a driver. You are now dealing with principals, not subordinates."

"This," said Randy, "has turned out to be a swell evening. First in order of importance, I have met Miss Smith again. In between I have acquired a string of stolen rubies of fabulous price; I have

met familiarly two gunmen, unidentified; I am being followed by Messrs. Crazy and Blinky; and I have been presented to Miss Sophia Brand. A crowded hour, what?"

"So crowded," said Sophia, "it jostles. Personally, if I were you, I'd think of something."

"While I talk I plan," said Randy with gay sententiousness. "Would I offend if I asked why you retired from your—er—chosen profession?"

"Not at all. First, it was beginning to bore me; second, it didn't pay; third, I've become very fond of Miss Smith, and she asked it as a favor."

"And now what?"

"I shall make a great deal more money a great deal more easily in honest business," said Sophia. "I'm very smart and almost abnormally able. I shall probably rise to be a second Hetty Green, but with a trifle more solicitude for my personal appearance."

"Is it fair to ask where you encountered Miss Smith?"

"It is not," Miss Smith said emphatically. "Please fix your mind on the immediate emergency."

"I wouldn't," said Randy severely, "be as mysterious as you are—not for gold and precious stones. It isn't womanly. Besides which, it is irritating. Isn't it enough to be beautiful and reeking with charm, without running around in a glittering mantle of glamour?"

"If," said Sophia, "you don't arrive at an expe-

dient, you will presently be occupying what the uncultured call a wooden overcoat."

"To my muttuns," said Randy. "What says the great ballad?

*"It is sweet to dance to violins
When Love and Life are fair; . . .
But it is not sweet with nimble feet
To dance upon the air."*

"Garbled, perhaps, but to the point, if you substitute automatic revolvers for gallows." He leaned forward and spoke to the driver. "Young man, you will proceed to Fifth Avenue and thence northward. When you arrive at Fifty-ninth Street you will make haste—and when I say haste, haste is what I mean. Jump the traffic, if you can do so without peril to life or limb, and I'll square the cops. Are your brakes good?"

"Swell," said the chauffeur.

"Then see how suddenly you can come from top speed to a full stop when I give the word," said Randy. He leaned back again. "They're not likely to tackle us in the open, I take it."

"Those lads will tackle you any place or follow you anywhere," said Sophia.

"My compliments to them. When this taxi stops, will you ladies be spry? If our man does his job, the enemy will shoot past us a ways before they can stop, and split seconds are of the essence of the contract."

"I believe," said Sophia to herself, "the young thing has some sort of an idea."

They swung across to the Avenue at a very notable speed and then headed northward. Traffic was not heavy and the driver was skillful. At Fifty-ninth Street the following car was half a block behind them.

"Now step on her," Randy said.

The other car crept up upon them; was not a dozen feet behind.

"Edge toward the curb," Randy ordered. "Get ready. House on the southeast corner. Now! Slam on the brakes!"

The cab lurched, skidded, came to a stop which all but hurled them from their seats. The other car whizzed past them. Already Randy had the door open.

"Scamper," he said, and with the young women at his heels, ran across the walk to his own front door, which he unlocked and opened with sure, swift, deft movements. "Up the stairs," he said gayly. "The drawing-room is on the right."

Miss Smith looked back. "You forgot to close the door," she cried.

"Exactly," said Randy. He paused at the top of the stairs an instant until he saw two men rush to the entrance, pause a moment as if in indecision, and then enter, crouching and ready. Randy permitted them to see him, and then turned as if in flight. The pursuers rushed headlong up the stairs, where they paused as suddenly as the taxicab had

stopped, for Randy stood in the drawing-room archway, smiling and bowing genially.

"Do come in," he said affably. "I was expecting you."

In their moment of surprise, he turned and walked into the room. "This way," he said. "You might remove your hats before you join the ladies."

The man who bore proudly the name of Crazy Kane was in the lead, and he showed his teeth in a saturnine grin. "Kick in wit' them stones, kid," he said grimly, and then, with a sneer: "Was you in too much hurry to shut the door?"

"The book of etiquette," said Randy, "tells us guns are worn in the pocket in the presence of ladies. . . . Ah, Wilmot," to a servant who appeared in answer to his ring, "refreshments for the gentlemen. . . . Miss Smith, Miss Brand, may I present Mr. Matthews and Mr. Kane?"

"Cut the gab and kick in wit' the rubies," said Mr. Matthews shortly. "Say, what kind of a dump is this here anyhow?"

"And by the way," Randy continued to the departing servant, "when Mr.—er—Hyde returns, ask him to change into the gray suit and step into the drawing-room."

"He returned just before you, sir."

"Then ask him to make haste, please. Say that we have guests."

"Say—" commenced Mr. Kane; but Randy interrupted: "Do be seated. I really have an excellent cellar—and we have so much to talk over."

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"What is this joint—a swell speak-easy?" asked Mr. Matthews.

"It's swell," said Randy, "but not a speak-easy. Now, as to the Ramikin rubies—I understand you had planned to acquire them yourselves."

"And the dame slipped in ahead," said Mr. Matthews.

"So really," said Randy, "you have no valid claim. First come, first served. But we'll discuss it. Now, first about the open door below. It was not an oversight. I really desired your better acquaintance. If I had shut you out you would have been hanging around, now, wouldn't you? You'd have been underfoot. Every time I went in or out, there you'd be—which would be unpleasant. No, it's best to talk it over and clean the matter up in a final sort of way. Don't you agree?"

"We agree we're goin' to have them rubies now. Fork 'em over," said Mr. Kane menacingly.

Randy took Miss Smith's bag from his pocket and extracted from it the rubies, blood red, scintillating, marvelous. "Really, you know," he said, "you haven't the faintest claim. . . . Ah, thank you, Wilmot—and nice-looking sandwiches, too. By the way, did you ever see an arrangement like this?"

He swung back a section of books and disclosed a small wall safe, ajar. Nonchalantly he tossed the rubies within, closed the door and twisted the knob. "Just for the sake of argument," he said smilingly. "Really the latest model. Said to be inaccessible to the most skilled petermen. They will rest there

very nicely until we finish our discussion, don't you think?"

Kane snorted. "Not so slick," he said between his teeth, as he pressed his gun against Randy's abdomen. "Open her up, kid."

"They can't get away," Randy said, and then: "Ah, here I come. You thought I was here—did you not?—right at the end of your gun, but there I am yonder. . . . Evening, Waggy. Come in and meet the guests."

Kane blinked, stared, ejaculated. Matthews merely stared, being of a more taciturn nature.

Here, with a gun against his stomach, stood the young man they had pursued to this strange house, but yonder in the archway he stood also. Feature for feature, garment for garment, identical.

"Wat t'ell!" exclaimed Mr. Kane.

"Precisely," said Randy. "Bewildering, isn't it? I thought it would entertain you. . . . Do help yourselves."

The phenomenon of resemblance unsteadied them; they lost assurance and their eyes began to shift uneasily. "Say, what's this joint?" Matthews demanded again.

"Just a house," said Randy, "easy to get into, but hard to get out of. Really impossible, I should say. You see, when I touched the safe door it gave the alarm below stairs. A device necessary to us conspicuous and idle rich. At the moment this room is dominated, if one may describe it so, by armed personages who draw adequate salaries for protecting my person and property." He paused

and shook his head. "No use to consider shooting your way out. A waste of energy. Besides, I have no complaint to make of you. So far as I know, you have committed no crime. And you've given me an entertaining evening. . . . Did you say something?"

They had made no remark.

"The situation is this: The rubies are in the safe. You can't get at them. To-morrow they will be returned to Mrs. Ramikin in a roundabout manner. If you like, you can start in again to see if you can acquire them from her—which is none of my business. Now, there is the situation. You are at liberty to run along—after you have refreshed yourselves and come to the conclusion it is not practical to meddle about this locality. And one other point: Miss Brand is not to be annoyed. Nor, indeed, will she annoy you in the future. As a matter of fact, she is giving up her profession and retiring to private life."

"Say—" Kane commenced to bluster.

"Naughty, naughty. Manners always! And by the way, I shall always be glad to see you socially. Drink with me now to better luck and happier days."

Kane regarded Matthews. "Let's git out of this booby hatch while the gittin' is good," he said.

"If you must hurry," Randy said regretfully. "Ah, then, Wilmot, show the gentlemen out. Good evening to you."

They descended the stairs, shoulder to shoulder, cautious, menacing, yet cowed, between what seemed to them a cordon of servants and guardians.

At the door Kane paused, made a gesture of derision—a face-saving gesture—and called raucously, “T’ell wit’ all of youse.”

Randy beamed upon the ladies. “You hardly can blame him,” he said.

“After all,” declared Miss Brand, “there seem to be advantages to great wealth, Mr. Hyde.”

He lifted his brows.

“I placed you as we rode up in the cab,” she said. “Your pictures, you know—and then, association with Miss Smith——”

“Hush,” said Miss Smith warningly.

“Oh, to be sure.” Miss Brand smiled. “And now?”

“Do you know,” Randy said, “there ought to be a niche in the Hyde enterprises into which the most proficient gem specialist in the world would fit. We always are on the outlook for genius, and even rejoice at talent. Shall we discuss the possibility to-morrow?”

“You are offering me a position, I take it?”

“Why, yes,” said Randy.

“Thanks awfully,” she said, “but I’ve rather an agreement with Miss Smith. She has offered——”

“We’re going to see if we can’t go into something together,” said Miss Smith hastily.

Randy’s eyes rested upon Miss Smith, and for the moment he forgot the presence of Smithfield Wagg, of Sophia Brand. He remembered only her.

“It seems,” he said, “pretty grand to have you in my house. As if you belonged. As if it were your inevitable and foreordained place.”

CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND

"Who can say?" asked Miss Smith pertly. "Even that miracle might happen."

"Then when may I see you again, and where?"

"When," said Miss Smith, "your persistence finds me; and where, I cannot say. But"—she smiled almost gently—"you have my permission to try very hard."

THE AX

By
Ben Hecht

ZELLER put the ax behind the furnace out of sight, the head of the ax on the cement floor, the long handle leaning against the side of the furnace. Still it wasn't hidden. It showed if you stood in certain places in the basement. Zeller nodded. He would take care she shouldn't stand in those places.

Then it seemed to Zeller suddenly that he was lying, that he was not going to kill Mrs. Lansen. The whole thing was a fake. Coming down in the basement to wait for her, hiding the ax and emptying the barrel in the corner so it would be ready for her—he was making believe. It was a lie. The thought that he was lying to himself became intolerable to Zeller.

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BEN HECHT

He had lain awake all night enjoying the death of Mrs. Lansen. The way she would come walking into the dark basement, angry and proud and sneering as always, calling, "Zeller, Zeller." And he would listen to her. Her complaints. They would be the last complaints she would ever make.

For five years he had never answered her. Just a mumble, his head hanging. This time he would look right at her, straight into her eyes while she hollered at him.

Everybody was afraid of her. How many times he had heard that daughter of hers getting her head banged against the wall and crying, "Mother, Mother, don't!" And how many times he had heard that husband of hers whining while she hollered at him.

The whole neighborhood was afraid of her. The way she held her head and sneered, as if people were dirt under her feet.

But he was lying. He wasn't going to kill her. He was going to hang his head again and mumble. He knew this because his stomach was like ice.

Zeller walked to the ax and picked it up. He could hardly close his fingers on it. It seemed alive, as if it would jump away. Suddenly he swung the ax through the air. There was a metallic crash, a terrible bang of sound that filled the basement. He had cracked the side of the furnace.

He threw the ax to the ground and stood staring at it. He was crying. The tears ran from his eyes down his cheeks.

THE AX

He remembered how he had come home eight years ago and there was no supper on the kitchen table and his wife was gone. Gone—the rooms empty, all her clothes gone. Gone with some man, loving somebody else; and he had lain in the empty bed hugging her pillow and crying—just like he was crying now.

He picked up the ax and held it against him. It made him feel weak. He wanted to kiss it.

A voice began speaking in his ears. It said, "What do you tell yourself lies for? You ain't gonna kill anybody. You're a liar."

Zeller caught his breath. His body quivered and a soft broken wail came from him.

"Zeller! Zeller! Where are you? Come right here!"

Mrs. Lansen. She was coming down. Her heels banging on the stairs made him wince.

He tried to put the ax back quickly out of sight but the air seemed to have thickened around him so that he had to push against it to move. He was putting the ax behind the furnace but slowly, slowly, as if he were bewitched. What if he didn't get it hidden in time!

"Zeller! Zeller, where are you?"

He was waiting for her.

"Good heavens, why don't you answer me? Standing there like an idiot!"

She was coming across the dark basement. His eyes were on the ground but he could see her: the sneer, the angered face, the proud head that called him dirt.

BEN HECHT

"You lazy fool, letting the fire go down! On a cold day like this. And the walks unshoveled. What am I paying you for? To stand around and do nothing? Wake up! Don't look so stupid. Look at me! What was that noise down here?"

Zeller shivered and hung his head.

"I heard something smash."

Zeller mumbled.

"Haven't you any common, ordinary sense? Look up at me. I'm talking to you."

Zeller's stomach felt like ice. He lifted his head slowly, fearfully. There she was, an old woman with rouge on her face, and her hair done fancy. Hollering at him.

Why was he so frightened? She would see him trembling. Why couldn't he breathe through his nose instead of keeping his mouth open and panting—so she could see? He hung onto the side of the furnace. It was hot, burning his hand. But if he let go he would fall down. He felt limp.

He wanted to scream something. Go 'way! Go 'way quick, Mrs. Lansen! He wanted to scream this at her, at her rouged old face, at her finger with rings on it shaking under his nose. He was a liar. The ax, the barrel, the banging on the furnace—these were lies. He stood staring at the angry rouged face, shivering. Then he heard a noise, a faint noise behind the furnace. The noise made his heart stop beating. It was the ax. The ax had fallen down. Somebody had knocked over the ax.

No. Not somebody. He had done it himself. He wasn't standing here. He was behind the furnace

THE AX

knocking over the ax and pushing it out so the handle showed. This made him feel queer—that there should be two Zellers in the basement.

He could hear that other one behind the furnace breathing—or it might be the fire in the grate making that noise. He must see what was there. She wanted to know what the noise was. What noise? What noise? That was himself mumbling. But wait a minute—there was somebody behind the furnace.

Zeller leaned over slowly and touched the ax handle. He was afraid it would jump away. But it came into his hand.

Again the air seemed to thicken so he could hardly move. He was moving as fast as he could, yet between each of his movements, between putting his hand on the ax and picking it up; between picking it up and turning around to look at Mrs. Lansen, there were terrible pauses as if he were paralyzed. Something began to whimper in his ears. "Faster . . . faster."

Then everything stopped. Mrs. Lansen stopped. He was looking at her.

A strange feeling was in him, a warm flood that melted the ice in his stomach. There wasn't time for her to run away. She was just as paralyzed as he was.

The air was too thick for her to move in. She was waiting for him, giving him plenty of time, with her eyes raised looking at something in the air and her mouth wide open.

Through this stopping of everything Zeller saw Mrs. Lansen for an instant and this instant seemed longer to him than his whole life. The Mrs. Lansen he saw filled him with so great a happiness that he shouted. A queer Mrs. Lansen with red spots on her withered cheeks like an old clown; a Mrs. Lansen whose face was twisted into a frightened, imploring expression.

In this instant Zeller forgot about the ax. He was going to say something but he couldn't speak fast enough. The ax kept moving, flying. He was killing her.

Zeller closed his eyes. He was flying with the ax, flying in circles up and down as if in a marvelous dream. Then his arms grew tired. The flying was over.

There were noises in the basement. The fire roared. Boards creaked. Lumps of coal slid over each other in the coal bin. Zeller looked around. There was the barrel. He hadn't lied. It had all happened. He felt proud. He pulled Mrs. Lansen along the cement floor toward the barrel and was surprised at the way she looked. Zeller came out of the basement smiling sleepily. He blinked at the sunny winter morning, at the bright, peaceful street. He started walking away and it seemed to him his heart would break with this sense of peace and brightness that was in the world. Then when he had walked several blocks Zeller stopped. A voice was calling behind him.

"Zeller! Zeller! Where are you?" He stood still. "Zeller!"

How could it be that thing in the barrel calling him?

"Zeller! Zeller! Come here at once!"

Yes. Mrs. Lansen! He was a liar. He had only made believe. It hadn't happened. He had fooled himself. The ax, the barrel, hadn't happened. Again his stomach felt like ice.

"Zeller! Zeller! Where are you?"

The voice screamed in his ears. Violent, nagging, like he was dirt under her feet. A sob such as a child gives who has cried too long came from him. Then, as his name repeated itself over and over in his ears, Zeller began to run. He ran wildly, his legs weaving under him.

He was running back to the basement. He would show her if he was a liar. He would show himself who was a liar. He would grab the ax and chase her through the house and keep his eyes open this time.

A crowd of men and women stood around the basement door. At the far end of the dark basement policemen with flash lights were looking into a barrel.

Zeller stood for a moment bewildered. A boy was screaming and pointing at his reddened hands.

MR. PICARELLI TAKES
A BATH

By
James Warner Bellah

ARISTODEMO BORCO

broke his soft-boiled eggs into the extra coffee cup that always came up with his breakfast tray from the restaurant. He was a big man and egg cups were one of his pet aversions. From his butter, he sliced off an adequate gob and squeegeed it against the rim of the cup. It melted and slid down inside until it rested upon the yellow and white whorls of egg. He crumbled bread on top and blanketed the concoction with salt and pepper, whipping the whole thing into a substantial patisse, which he wolfed not too silently.

"Pic," he said as he reached for the white-metal coffee-pot, "get the car."

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JAMES WARNER BELLAH

Mr. Picarelli looked at him, snapped his combination nail clipper and file shut, stuffed it in his trouser pocket and reached for his coat. That was an excellent coat. A little too pronounced in line, perhaps; a little too sharp at the waist and lapel, but an excellent coat for Mr. Picarelli. The breast pocket, for instance, was hardly more than two inches deep on the inside, although from the outside it appeared to be of the usual size. Mr. Picarelli put the coat on and stuffed a fragment of silk handkerchief into the breast pocket, arranging two points so that they cascaded over the edge and lay flat against the Glen Urquhart plaid. He patted the pocket carefully into shape. Mr. Picarelli's tailor was deft at his work. No one would suspect for a moment that Mr. Picarelli carried a torch over his heart.

"All right, Big Boy." He went out.

Mr. Borco was ready when he returned. He drew on his gloves and settled his pearl-gray homburg over his right ear. Mr. Picarelli opened the apartment door and stepped down the corridor. Mr. Borco waited until he saw the white light go on above the elevator door; then he walked out, closed his apartment door carefully and slid into the elevator. Ten floors below, with Mr. Picarelli preceding him, he stepped into the lobby and walked toward the revolving glass doors that led to Sixty-second Street. While Mr. Borco waited, Mr. Picarelli got into the limousine and started the motor. A man couldn't be too careful—a man in Mr. Borco's shoes. Mr. Picarelli was paid two

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hundred dollars weekly to snap on ignition switches for Mr. Borco, lest the car roar suddenly and writhe into a smoking, twisted wreck if he did it himself.

Mr. Borco opened the rear door and let his two hundred and forty pounds of soft, pink flesh sink comfortably into the down upholstery and come to rest behind half-inch armor plate and splinter-proof glass.

Mr. Picarelli drove the car downtown through the noon traffic and jockeyed its glittering length in and out between lumbering trucks and darting taxis. At City Hall Park he worked east into William Street and on, crawling through the financial lunch crowds, sliding presently to the curb.

Mr. Borco crossed hurriedly to the entrance and was whisked up twenty-one floors to the offices of the Financial Trading Company. He let himself in the door of his private room and hung up his hat and coat. He stood for a moment at the window, warming his hands on the radiator top and staring out toward the gray mists of the harbor. The palms of his hands were moist. He wiped them on his handkerchief.

Beyond those mists was Europe, six short days away. Europe and freedom. No more sleepless nights, no more nervous waiting while Picarelli went on ahead to smell out traps. No more walking in the gray shadow. It was a dream he had had for months, and it was ready for him now.

Europe, and Aristodemo Borco a rich man to

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enjoy it—a rich American with money to burn. European ladies. He rubbed his hands and turned to his desk for a long black cigar. It took a clever man to know when to pull out.

He smoked the cigar slowly, going over his few plans, one by one, until he was sure that every loophole was plugged. At 2:30 he put on his hat and went down to the Mechanics and Farmers Bank. The elevator took him right through to the basement.

The man at the outer desk nodded to him and let him through the heavy, barred gate. It always made Mr. Borco jump to hear that gate clank behind him. He showed his card and was ushered into the vault. The attendant took the four safe-deposit boxes and carried them to a private room. Behind a locked door, Mr. Borco pulled a large piece of folded brown paper from his pocket and emptying the boxes, made a sizable bundle of large denominational bills tied with manila twine. Casual—always.

Twenty minutes later he was back in his office, lighting another cigar. The bundle lay negligently under the hat rack.

Miss Levy tapped on his door and entered. She had six checks in her hand. Mr. Borco indorsed each of them for the Marine Transfer Protective Association, A. Borco, Treas. Chicken feed, but it all helped. Forbes and Morrison, the Acme Lighterage Company, Graystone Transfer, Bailey, Gottlieb and Stone, the Tristate Express and Jones & Bostick. Fifteen hundred dollars

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apiece to protect their scows and barges from being scuttled, their tugs from sabotage and the merchandise they handled from molestation.

"Take them down, Miss Levy, and cash them," said Mr. Borco.

At 4:30 Mr. Picarelli came into Mr. Borco's private office without knocking. Mr. Picarelli had been collecting from other Borco enterprises.

"Twenty-five grand," he said. He shoved his Boston bag into the litter of papers on the desk top. "The boys up at Number Three are quitting to-night."

"What for?"

"The buggy-jumping plant next door got knocked off last night while the boys were cooking, and they ain't takin' no chances, Big Boy."

"All right."

"What do you mean—all right? Ain't you goin' to try to pull out? They got seventeen hundred gallons there now, and the outfit's worth seven thousand alone."

"If they're going to knock us off, they're going to. We don't kick in to them for Number Three."

"I know it. That's why I called up Joe Lipshitz and told him to get the tank wagon down from a Hundred Twenty-fifth Street. What's the matter, Big Boy—slippin'?"

"What do you mean?"

"Ain't you got nothing to say?"

"Sure, I got something to say."

"Say it then."

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"What good is the tank wagon? Ain't they watchin' the buggy jumpers?"

"That's better. Sure they are, but they ain't got no hit and run for us yet, see? So we just back in the Tenth Street alley and pipe the stuff from a window and garage it for a couple of days until we're clear to take it across the river."

"Who's drivin'?"

"Joe."

"All right." Mr. Borco opened the bag and stacked the notes before him. "I'm going to be here a couple of hours. You got time to make the Montague Street collection over in Brooklyn."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

Mr. Picarelli looked at his chief for a long moment and went out.

Mr. Borco gave his shadow a fifteen-minute start. It was already growing dark.

II

Mr. Borco took two traveling bags from a steel locker in the corner—two bags that he had kept packed and ready for months. He untied the brown paper bundle under the hat tree and calmly stuffed nine hundred thousand dollars into the traveling bags. Then, leaving his desk light on, he locked the door behind him and walked down twenty flights of stairs. At the floor above the street he opened a fireproof door and slipped into a service passage that led him to the rear of

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the building. Then he went down three flights of iron stairs, scurried through a dark hallway, came up two flights and walked out the rear entrance of the building into Exchange Place. He popped into a cab.

"Staten Island ferry," he said. The driver started to snap up his flag in front of the ferry-house. Mr. Borco tapped on the glass.

"Go right on," he said. "I'm going to New Dorp." The driver touched his cap.

Mr. Borco paid the driver off in front of a drug store, picked up his bags and went down a side street. Four minutes later he was in another cab on his way to Elizabeth via Outerbridge. In Elizabeth he had the driver take him to Coogan Street. There he got out and walked up the alley behind No. 21.

At nine o'clock another cab picked him up, and at 10:30 he was aboard the Twenty-third Street ferry, bound for Manhattan once more. Eleven-fifteen found him safe in his stateroom behind a locked door, with his ports curtained, his shoes and coat off, and another cigar between his lips.

Clever, Mr. Borco was. No one with a suspicion. No one with the faintest idea where to pick up the trail. The boys could curse all they wanted to, and after they had finished, they could all go to hell. Nobody was going to rub him out.

For two days Mr. Borco stayed in his cabin, having his meals brought from the saloon. No need to take any chances. None of his people on board a swell tub like this, but you never could

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tell—some of the Broadway theatrical crowd might be crossing, and spot him and pass the word back. Not that it would make any difference. Once he hit France he was safe, but there was no use having the boys know where he had gone—even if they couldn't put the spot on him now.

He drained the last of his highball and rang for another. Funny moke, that steward. Cockney. Always saying "sir" and bowing. Name of Prout.

Aristodemo Borco stood up and stretched. Getting dark outside—dark and foggy, with a thin, chill drizzle of rain frosting the deck and the long rows of chairs that were racked for the night.

No one out there—no one to talk to. Gee, he wished he could chew the rag with somebody. Even Pic. Pic wasn't so bad. Maybe he ought to have brought Pic along with him and not hung him up with the rest of the gang. He shook his head.

"Nope, cut all the strings when you're cutting them."

There was a knock, and Harry Prout opened the door. "Beg pardon, sir. Did you ring, sir?"

"Yeah," said Mr. Borco. "It's gettin' foggy out, ain't it?"

"A bit thickish, sir. We usually gets it this time of year."

"Yeah? I suppose that makes it hard going for the captain, don't it?"

"'Ard goin', sir? Oh, no, not fer 'im, sir. You get used to weather at sea, sir. . . . Was there anything I could do?"

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"Yeah; I want another snort."

"Snort, sir?"

"Drink—whisky, savvy?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Thank you, sir." Harry Prout picked up the tray and the empty glass. He closed the door softly behind him. Perhaps forty seconds passed before the door opened and closed again just as quietly.

"Gettin' careless in your old age, ain't you, Big Boy?"

Mr. Borco wheeled as if a whiplash had cut his bare shoulders. He found himself looking into the little round black hole of Mr. Picarelli's gun. Mr. Picarelli was smiling.

"Forgot to lock the door that time, di'n' ya?"

"How the——"

"Sure, get curious, Big Boy—get curious. It's your turn. Here—I'll take it to keep your mind off it." He whipped a clean handkerchief from his pocket and flicked it open across the palm and fingers of his left hand. The hand snaked into Mr. Borco's right armpit and came out with Mr. Borco's rod wrapped in the handkerchief. Mr. Picarelli put the gun in his coat pocket.

"How'd you trail me, Pic?"

"Trail you?" Mr. Picarelli laughed and backed to the cabin door. With his left hand he shot the bolt.

"When the limey comes with your drink, Big Boy, I step into the bathroom, see?"

"But how—what do you want?"

"About a million—whatever you got. If you'd

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been nice about it, half would've been enough—but not now. Trying to run away from all the boys. Ain't you ashamed?"

"I got a right to pull out if I want to. . . . How'd you know?"

"You painted it on the fence, Big Boy—that's how. I knew you too well. I knew it was in your mind, see, and all I had to do was keep my eyes open. Guys like you don't get letters from the State Department for nothing, see? Yours was a passport. I waited six months for you to buy the tickets after you got it. I knew you'd buy 'em at the hotel agency or downtown, 'cause those were the only two places you dared to show without me. When you bought 'em I got a duplicate set myself. . . . Got it now?"

"What do you want?"

"Whatever you got—all of it."

There was a knock on the door. Mr. Picarelli slid into the bathroom. Mr. Borco crossed the cabin.

"Yes, sir." Harry Prout held the tray while Mr. Borco signed the chit. Mr. Borco closed the door, bolted it and sat down upon the locker top, raising the drink to his lips.

"Well," he said pleasantly, "I don't see what you're going to do about it. You ain't going to rub me out on no ocean liner. They'd grab you in a minute."

"Yeah?" said Mr. Picarelli. "Well, don't you take no chances, Big Boy. Open them bags."

"Suppose you do take the stuff," Mr. Borco

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whined, "they'll get you. Come on, Pic; I'll split with you——"

"Open them bags!"

III

Harry Prout opened his slop locker and snapped on the light. He emptied his dust bin and washed his hands. From the linen cupboard he took down a pile of fresh towels for his evening round. It was half-past five by his watch, hanging on a hook beside the door.

When he came to Cabin 202, Mr. Borco, coat and vest off, was slowly pacing up and down. Harry crossed to the bathroom, wadded the dirty towels and racked the clean ones.

Mr. Borco's type was new to him. Something like the thin foreign gentleman in 206, name of Picarelli. Harry Prout didn't quite like either one of them. Somehow they didn't seem to belong on a liner like. He'd seen silk shirts on passengers before, and sleeve garters—it wasn't that and it wasn't that they'd never crossed before, unless they'd done it in the steerage. It was something different—something in the eyes maybe. Mr. Borco was soft and pinky, with a smell of bay rum about him, and his slicked hair always up at the back where he'd been lying on his pillow all the time; and his coat, when he had it on, always creased across the small of his back—but his eyes were wrong, watery and jumpy—fright-

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ened of something like, and more frightened tonight than they had ever been before.

"Bet 'arf a dollar 'e's done something in 'is time 'e ayn't proud of," Harry Prout was thinking as he went out and dropped his towels in the cross passage.

Mrs. Donaldson was not in 204. He tidied her cabin and went down into the next cross passage forward to 206.

Mr. Picarelli was filing his nails as he always was—filing his nails and smoking a cigarette sideways like. It always reminded Harry Prout of Harry Appleby on the old Scotia, when a man smoked a cigarette like that—letting it hang from the upper lip and holding his head sideways like, and squinting up his left eye to keep the smoke out of it. Appleby had been waiting his turn at Number 4 boat when the second torpedo hit. Harry Prout could see him standing there yet, thin and bent like, standing there with his cigarette hanging and the smoke of it going straight up in the dead air. Then there had been a hot, yellow flash and a big jagged bite all up the side of the old Scotia—nothing but that and Appleby's red cigarette fizzing out in the leaden water under Harry Prout's hand as it rested on the gunwale of Number 2 boat.

It wasn't the cigarette only with Mr. Picarelli, and it wasn't that he wore thin silk socks over the lumpy bottoms of his underdrawers—so thin you could see right through them. It was his eyes too. Hard and narrow like. Cruel eyes.

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"'Ate to 'ave 'im mad at me."

Harry slicked up the bathroom and dumped the wadded towels on top of his pile in the passage. He emptied the ash trays into his dust pan and wiped them with a damp rag.

"Always work hard when I'm here, don't you?" said Mr. Picarelli.

"Oh, no, sir; the work ayn't so 'ard."

"Don't I know it? Why don't you quit it and get a man's job, instead of being a lousy chambermaid?"

"Chambermyde, sir?"

"Sure—flunkying. Don't you ever get tired of it?"

"Oh, yes, sir; sometimes I do. I ayn't as young as I might be."

"How long 've you been at it?"

"Twenty years and more, sir."

"Twenty years! On a job like yours?"

"Well, sir, it 'as its ups and downs, sir. But it's more int'resting than it seems, sir."

"Yeah? Well, you can have it."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

Back in his locker once more, Harry Prout unwadded his pile of dirty towels and separated them, bath from face—separated them and laid them flat, one upon the other, to roll up and take to the drying room and the laundry.

"'Ullo; 'ole in this one." He held it up. There was a round, frayed hole in the center of the towel big enough to stick his finger in, and three more holes near the border.

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“’Oles in this one, too, strewth! ’Oles in every bleedin’ one.” He held up the last two towels. They were full of small charred holes, and the last one was scorched in the center for a space that he could hardly cover with his hand.

“’Oo’d be puttin’ ’oles in good towels like that? Like they stuck ’em in deliberate wiv a red ’ot poker! Spoiled they are—complete. Shyme.” Harry Prout shook his head and tossed the towels aside. He rolled the others and stood up.

Above his head, the buzzer purred and the indicator snapped to 206—Mr. Picarelli.

Harry Prout touched the clearing handle, pulled down his coat and closed his cubby. He went down to the cross passage and knocked.

“Come in.”

He stepped into the cabin. The bathroom door was open. The shower curtain was drawn. Mr. Picarelli pulled it open slightly with one hand and stuck his head out.

“Get me some soap, will ya? How am I going to take a shower without soap?”

“Yes, sir; sorry, sir.”

Harry went out and hurried up the passage. As he opened his locker once more and reached for the soap box, the buzzer purred again and the arrow quivered on 202—Mr. Borco. Harry backed out.

“Mr. Picarelli’s soap first.” He hurried up the corridor, but at the first cross passage his throat tightened as if a wire had been looped around it, and he stopped dead in his tracks, palms suddenly

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wet. The echo of the shot died in the ship's muttering. There was a light, splintering crash and the heavy noise of a falling body.

Harry Prout turned on his heel and a split second later he was rapping on Mr. Borco's door. There was no answer. He wrenched the knob and opened the door.

Mr. Borco lay flat on his back on the cabin deck, with a gun just beyond the clenched fingers of his left hand. A splintered chair lay across his feet. He stared up at Harry, his eyes questioning slightly, but no longer afraid. Harry Prout shut the door and locked it with his pass-key as Mrs. Donaldson turned into the end of the passage with her small daughter.

Harry opened her door for her and went up to the corridor. For a moment he stood there trembling. There was something in his hand—soap. Mr. Picarelli's. From force of habit he knocked on 206.

"Come in!"

"The soap, sir."

Mr. Picarelli stretched a hand outside of the shower curtain and reached for the cake.

"You took long enough!"

"Sorry, sir."

Five minutes later Harry Prout was in the chief steward's office forward on the saloon deck. The purser opened the door.

"Tell him, Prout," said the chief.

"Hit's abaht the gentleman in 202, sir; 'e's bin an' killed 'isself."

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"What?"

"Not ten minutes gone, sir. I 'eard the shot m'self; an' I opened the door, I did, an' there 'e was on the deck, sir. Mrs. Donaldson was comin' in the passage. There weren't no use o' touchin' 'im, sir—I can tell by the eyes, sir. I closed the door and locked it wiv m' key."

"The devil," said the purser.

"Yes, sir; that's wot I thought, sir. It ayn't 'ap-pened on this ship before, sir."

"Get the doctor. . . . Let's have your key, Prout. . . . Come along, Drury."

IV

The doctor, Mr. Evans, the purser, and the captain stood just inside Cabin 202, with Harry Prout behind them, backed against the closed door.

"That's that," said the doctor.

"Right you are." Captain Holmes nodded. "We'll take him in to Southhampton. Arrange for it, will you, McKenzie?"

"Yes, sir."

"The steward will lock the door now and give you the key. Wait until after midnight before you take the body aft. Steward, you'll say nothing about this to anyone."

"Oh, no, sir. I won't sye a word, I won't."

"What's the matter, Evans?"

The purser was kneeling and looking under the bed. He turned around.

"I was just wondering, sir." He pointed to the

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automatic that lay just out of reach of Mr. Borco's stiffened fingers. "The empty shell should be somewhere about."

"The empty shell?" said the captain.

"Yes, sir. I don't seem to see it anywhere."

"By Jove." Doctor McKenzie stepped across the cabin.

"Maybe he's lying on it," said the captain.

"We'll soon see, sir. . . . Here, steward, take the feet, will you? . . . Lend us a hand, Evans."

They lifted Mr. Borco to his bed. The captain tilted his cap back. "Funny go," he said. "Must be somewhere, unless it jammed in the gun."

"It didn't." Mr. Evans shook his head. "You can see. The gun is lying ejector side up and the panel's closed, sir."

"So it is." The captain bent down. "Those things snap out with some force. Perhaps it bounced into the lavatory."

"I'll 'ave a look, sir."

"Not in the cabin, that's certain, and the ports are all down."

Harry Prout came out of the bathroom. "It's not in 'ere, sir—nowhere."

"What do you make of that?"

"I'm damned if I know. Are you sure it's nowhere about?"

The four men went down on their hands and knees.

"It must be somewhere."

But it wasn't.

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"See here," said the captain, "who started this empty-shell business anyway?"

The purser flushed. "I did, sir. I don't know why it occurred to me, but it does stand to reason that if a man shoots himself with an automatic in a closed cabin, there's bound to be an empty shell somewhere, isn't there?"

"Well, there isn't one here, and that's that."

The purser scratched his ear. "You wouldn't care to have Mr. Shapiro up, would you, sir?"

"Shapiro—who is Shapiro?"

"He's crossing for the International Police Conference in London, sir. I believe he's an inspector attached to the municipal police force in New York City."

"To find an empty shell for us and broadcast a suicide to the ship? Certainly not."

"Very good, sir."

"Look here, Evans. Are you trying to suggest that this isn't suicide?"

"I think, sir, that if we are interested in proving that it is, we've got to find that shell."

"What do you think, McKenzie?"

The doctor shrugged. "It's suicide as far as I'm concerned. I'm going by the powder burns, and Prout here says there was no one in the cabin, and no one could have passed him as he came down the cross passage."

"'Arf a tick, sir!" Harry Prout gulped. "I mean, I beg your pardon, I does, but hit's just occurred to me, it 'as indeed——"

"What has?"

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"Well, sir, Mr. Borco kept to 'is cabin, 'e did, an' I used to bring 'im 'is meals. 'E seemed lonely like an', beggin' yer pardons, 'e used to like to talk wiv me. Not that I hencouraged hit, sir, but I couldn't just dash off when 'e was talkin'. I've seen 'im eat, an' I've seen 'im drink, an' I've seen 'im writin'; an if I may sye so, Mr. Borco was left-'anded, an' if I mistyke not, 'e's bin an' shot 'isself in the roight side of 'is 'ead."

"There you are, sir," said the purser.

"Are you sure, Prout?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I couldn't myke no mistyke on that, sir."

"Very well, Evans. Ask this Mr. Shapiro to step into your cabin after dinner, and call me when he comes. Lock up, steward, and stay on duty."

"Very good, sir."

V

Mr. Shapiro mouthed his cigar and sat back on the locker top.

"It's Big Boy Borco all right. I'd know that mug in a million, and it's his gun; the prints don't lie." He nodded to the desk top with its litter of smudged paper, lamp-black and camel's-hair brushes. "And I guess it's suicide too. I don't care where the bullet went in or where the empty shell is. You can't have a murder without a murderer. That's first princi-

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ples. . . . Wait a minute. Maybe it isn't either. Anyone touched these ports?"

Evans shook his head. "They're just as we found them."

"Well," Mr. Shapiro took the stub of his cigar from his mouth and waved it toward the walls of the cabin, "those three are clamped down but this one's just shut. That could be pushed open from the deck outside, couldn't it?"

"I think it could."

"You know it could. We'll give it a look. Stay here."

In a few minutes Mr. Shapiro was back in the cabin.

"There you are, friends. Lying in the gutter or the scuppers or whatever you call it."

Shapiro chuckled the brass shell case in his hand for a moment and tossed it on the desk.

"Now we got murder, I guess. . . . Tell us your story again, George."

Harry Prout's hands stiffened on the seams of his trousers. "Well, sir, as I said before, sir, I 'eard the shot, an' I stops at the end of the passage."

"How'd you know it was a shot?"

"Well, beggin' yer pardon, sir, I knew it was because when William 'Enery gets to drinkin' bad, sir—in one of 'is spells as you might sye, sir——"

"Who's William Henery?"

"'E's my son, sir—'im as lorst 'is leg at Wipers——"

"Lost his leg? What's that got to do with it?"

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"Well, sir—beggin' pardon like—he lorst it smashin' up them Germans, an' 'Is Majesty gyve 'im the D. C. M. for it, 'e did—gyve it to 'im 'isself at Buckingham, 'e did."

"But for the love of Pete, what's all this got to do with the shot?"

"Well, sir, you arsked me 'ow I knowed hit was a shot I 'eard, an' I'm tellin' you, I am. I knowed hit because when William 'Enery gets a drinkin' spell 'e goes up to 'is room an' shoots 'isself to sleep."

"He does what!"

"It comforts 'im like. 'E shoots 'oles in the ceiling until 'e falls asleep. 'E likes the noise an' the police never hinterferes because they was mostly wiv William 'Enery at the wars, sir. An' that's 'ow I knowed it was a shot. Shots mykes me jump like when I 'ears them, an' I always thinks of William 'Enery."

"That's very interesting."

"Yes, sir, but a bit noisy like, if I might sye so."

"I see. . . . Well, what did you do then?"

"Well, sir, I was on my wye to Cabin 206—Mr. Picarelli's cabin, sir—wiv soap."

"Who's cabin?" Mr. Shapiro sat up.

"Mr. Picarelli's."

"What's his first name?"

"It says just B on the door card."

"Bartolomo. We got it." Mr. Shapiro grinned. "How do you want it worked, captain? I can't throw no pinch aboard the ship."

"How do I want what worked?"

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Shapiro waved his cigar. "It's as plain as day. This Bartolomo Picarelli was Borco's Tommy-man in Chi. When Big Boy moved to New York with his racket, he kept Pic on for a bodyguard. Pic's in 206. Borco's here. Borco stages a pull-out and Pic puts the spot on him. Pic's our man. He wants what Borco's got, if any; so he smokes Borco through the porthole and plants Borco's own rod in here—but he forgets the empty shell. It's a British ship. I guess we better flash ahead for someone from Scotland Yard to meet us in Southampton. It'll be a surprise for Pic when he finds that he's going to be hanged instead of burned."

"I don't follow you at all," said the captain.

"No need to. I tell you Picarelli did it. But I can't throw no pinch for you. I'm out of my jurisdiction."

"But beg pardon, sir, 'e didn't do it." Harry Prout shook his head. "'E couldn't do it."

"What do you mean—he couldn't?"

"As I told you, sir. Before I 'eard the shot, Mr. Picarelli 'ad rung for soap, 'e 'ad. An' I saw 'im m'self in the shower. Then, after I 'ad 'eard the shot an' seen Mr. Borco a-lyin' on the deck, an' after I 'ad locked the door of this cabin, I went on wiv the soap before reportin' to the chief steward; an' when I brought the soap, Mr. Picarelli was still in the shower, wiv the curtain drawn."

Mr. Shapiro looked blank. "Say, wait a minute. You can't pull that on me. How much did he give you for that alibi?"

"Give me, sir? 'E didn't give me nothing."

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"Come on, now."

"Wait a minute, Shapiro." The captain frowned. "I don't know what your methods are, but I won't have talk of that kind. I know my ship fairly well, and as it happens, I know Prout. What he tells you is the truth. You have my word on it."

"But it's an alibi, don't you see?" snapped Shapiro. "It ties us up."

"If it is, it is."

"All right; then find out who killed Borco yourself."

"You're satisfied now that he was killed?"

"It's like the nose on your face. Someone smoked him from outside and threw the gun in as he fell."

"How'd the murderer get the gun in the first place?"

Inspector Shapiro shrugged. "Maybe he had it all along, waiting for just such a plant. Or maybe he just walked in and took it off Borco and walked out and shot him. If I was going to bump a man and make it look like suicide, I'd get his gun and fire a shot with it, and then, just as soon as I could afterwards, I'd smoke the man and chuck the gun in beside him."

"That would mean two shots, wouldn't it?"

"Maybe; or maybe he could muffle the shot he fired with the planted gun. . . . Did you hear two shots, Prout?"

"No, sir—but beggin' yer pardon, sir, 'ow could a gentleman muffle a shot?"

"Half a dozen ways."

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"Could 'e muffle it by wrapping the revolver hup in towels, sir—wet towels?"

"Sure he could. . . . What have you got now?"

"Nothing, sir; just the towels. I been wondering abaht them ever since, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"Across the passage in m' locker. I'll get them at once, sir."

Harry Prout came back and spread the perforated towels out on the locker top.

"Whose towels were they?"

"I couldn't sye, sir—fer certain I couldn't—because I 'ad all the towels from all m' cabins in a bundle, I did, but I think they came from Mr. Picarelli, sir—not meaning to myke no trouble. But 'e couldn't do it, sir, just the syeme. 'E was in 'is bath, sir. I'd swear to it."

Shapiro turned to the captain.

"Listen," he said; "I'm on my vacation, see? I didn't ask for this case. You got me on it. I know how you fellows feel about things like this aboard ship, and I'm not going to let you down. I want to tell you, though, that I know Pic and I know Borco. They were big-time once in Chi, and they were still pretty big-time in New York, but they were both just a couple of lousy rats to me, see? I tell you that Pic did this job——"

"But 'e couldn't, sir."

"Never mind that stuff, steward." Shapiro stood up. "And all I ask is that you let me talk to Pic for a minute. You asked me to help you, and

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you owe it to me. He won't think of jurisdiction and he won't open his mouth afterwards. You got my word on that. What about it?"

The captain looked at Shapiro for a moment. "All right," he said.

VI

Mr. Picarelli pulled on a dressing gown and tied it at the waist. He stuck his bare toes into his slippers and snapped his patented nail file shut. He punched out his cigarette and went into the bathroom. His bath was almost run. He tested the temperature with the tips of his fingers.

A key grated in the lock of his cabin door and the door swung open. Mr. Shapiro slid past Harry Prout and crossed to the bathroom.

"Hello, Shap," said Mr. Picarelli. "Didn't know you were on the hooker. What can I do for you?"

"You can come out here and sit down."

Mr. Picarelli looked at the captain and the purser, and grinned.

"Sure," he said. "What's on your mind?"

Shapiro frowned. "Big Boy Borco, Pic. We got you cold on it. You rubbed him out just before dinner."

"Sure; go on now and prove it." Mr. Picarelli took a cigarette from his pack and lit it. He leaned back against the bedpost, hands clasped behind his head.

"You took his rod from him and you fired a

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shot with it into a wad of towels to muffle the sound. Then you shoved open one of his portholes and bumped him by leaning in from the deck. Then you planted his gun on him with one shot fired out of it. We found your empty shell on the deck outside—the shell of the bullet that killed Big Boy.”

“I suppose you come here now to find my rod and fit the shell to it? Well, have a look around for it.”

“Beg pardon, sir; your bath’s running over.” Harry Prout stepped into the bathroom and turned off the taps.

“I guess you’re wise enough to toss the gun overboard; so we won’t bother about looking,” said Shapiro.

“Good boy,” said Picarelli. “All right. Move on to the next number. Who saw me do all this?”

“The steward heard the shot.”

Mr. Picarelli looked at Harry Prout. “You heard it, hey?”

“Yes, sir I ’eard it.”

“When was that?”

“Between the time you sent me for your soap, sir, and the time I brought it, beggin’ yer pardon, sir.”

“And where was I all that time?”

“If I might sye so, sir, you were be’ind the shower curtain, sir.”

Mr. Picarelli grinned. “You got a good memory, Skibo. Think you can remember that, if my friend here is foolish enough to want it told in court?”

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"I believe I could, sir, if hit's necessary." Harry Prout looked at the captain. "I wonder, sir, if I could be excused 'arf a mo'?"

"Go ahead."

Harry Prout went out.

"What more can I do for you, Shap?"

"A lot of things, see? Don't get the idea I ain't going to bust that alibi sky-high. I know this steward believes what he says, but he's got the time wrong, and I'm the white-haired boy to prove it."

"All right, I wish you luck. Now, if there's nothing more——"

There was a rustling noise from the bathroom. Shapiro and the captain stepped forward and pushed the door wide open.

Harry Prout's head and bare arm were sticking out of the drawn shower curtain.

"Beggin' yer pardon, sir, an' not meaning to myke no trouble, but wot does it look like?"

Mr. Picarelli slid forward.

"It's a lie!" he yelled.

"Steady!" Shapiro caught his wrist and twisted him to his knees.

Harry Prout slid the shower curtain back. He was standing on the deck outside, with his head and one arm, sleeve pushed back to the elbow, thrust through the porthole.

"The lousy rat!" screamed Mr. Picarelli. "You can't prove nothing, see! Borco took a pot at me first; it was self-defense——"

"Yeah? Through a porthole. You better get a good lawyer to explain that for you, Pic."

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"They can't touch me! Borco was pulling out, see? He was a rat too."

"Aw, shut up." Shapiro grinned. "Wha'd I tell you, cap? Ain't Pic the sweet boy? We'll just get a wire ahead to have him met, an' I guess we'd better have some bracelets for him until he cools off."

VII

"There's one thing," said Inspector Shapiro, "that I'd kinda like to know."

"Yes, sir." Harry Prout straightened his shoulders and pressed his hands against the seams of his trousers.

"The cap tells me that you've helped the Treasury men now and then, and that you're straight. I believe that Pic fooled you on the alibi, but how did you tumble to it?"

"Tumble to hit, sir?"

"Yeah, how'd you get the idea that he had been outside when you thought he was in the bath?"

"Oh, sir, if you please, that was easy after the second bath."

"The second bath?"

"Yes, sir—the one as nearly overflowed when we came in to see him."

"How come?"

"Well, sir, hit's the little things on ship-board that you get to notice. I'm very sorry, sir, that I

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myde the mistyke, I am. It's very 'umiliatin', sir, an' I arks yer pardon, I does, sir."

"That's all right. I've forgotten it, so you forget it."

"Yes, sir, and I certainly thank you, sir, I do."

"Well, go on about the bath."

"Yes, sir. Well, Mr. Picarelli, beggin' yer pardon, sir, 'e 'adn't tyken no baths before, an' when 'e was tykin' two wivvin an hour or so of each other, it struck me funny like; so when I went in to shut off the taps, I 'ad a look at 'is towels on the rack. There weren't one of 'em wet or disturbed since I put 'em there, the curtain of the shower wasn't wet inside, sir, an' the soap I'd brung 'im was still in the pyper wrapper, it was. Then I remembered wot you 'ad decided abaht poor Mr. Borco bein' shot through 'is porthole, an' it occurred to me wot did occur to me; so I went out on deck an' tried it, an' Mr. Picarelli did the rest."

"I see. H'm. You're a pretty good amachure detective, Prout, and I'm glad to know you."

"Thank you, sir."

"But there's always one thing you gotta remember in this work. When one guy murders another an' they're both a coupla rats like these two, never let no alibi stand in the way of your evidence. That's the trouble with amachures—they do too much thinking an' they never get to the point of the matter. I've seen lots of 'em, an' I know."

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"Yes, sir, I'm sure you do, sir, an' I'm very sorry I hinterfered."

"That's all right." Mr. Shapiro waved his hand. "Forget it. I'm not holdin' it against you; don't think that."

"I'm sure, sir, you're very kind, sir, an' I thanks you, I does. An' now—beggin' yer pardon, sir—it's best I get abaht m' bed turning. I'm 'arf an hour lyte as it is, sir."

ATCHISON ALWAYS WINS!

By

Mrs. Wilson Woodrow

and

C. C. Waddell

HEYWOOD ATCHISON

—famous criminal lawyer, art collector, man about town—sat in his bachelor apartment in a chair that had once belonged to Cardinal Richelieu.

Indeed, given a pointed beard, Atchison as he sat there might easily have posed for a portrait of the great cardinal. He wore a cassock-like dressing-gown of black silk edged with scarlet, and his crossed, small feet, of which he was inordinately proud, were in scarlet slippers. To add to the verisimilitude of the picture, a big, gray cat—Richelieu had a passion for cats—lay in his lap.

But this would have been a portrait of Richelieu not in an hour of power and supremacy, but

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at one of those critical moments when his control of the unstable king seemed slipping and he realized that only his crafty wits could save him from swift disgrace and possibly the headsman. Atchison's usually smooth brow below its wave of tossed-back, iron-gray hair was ruffled with lines of care; his gaze was somber and brooding; his mouth had lost its quizzical twist and was set in a grim groove.

The cat on his knee, staring with yellow, unblinking eyes up into his troubled face, uttered a plaintive little meow of question; but as Atchison paid no attention beyond continuing absently to stroke its soft fur it cuddled down and relaxed into a doze.

In the lawyer's intimate circle—a circle that comprised the fifteen or twenty persons in New York really worth knowing—this cat, Selim, like its various predecessors, was jokingly reputed to be a familiar spirit prompting Atchison in those legal arts and subtleties—some people called them chicaneries—by which for twenty years he had dominated the criminal courts.

But if such was Selim's province he had woefully failed his master now. Atchison for the first time in his career had a *cause célèbre*—the sensational murder trial of an actress—which he saw no chance to win. Not only was the proof of guilt incontestable, but, even more important in Atchison's eyes, popular sentiment had unanimously turned thumbs down on his client.

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He had played for time to the limit, exhausted every resource of delay and postponement; and now to-morrow she must appear for trial with no other defense than an absurd, incredible story unsupported by a single shred of evidence. Conviction was a foregone conclusion. Atchison's unbroken tradition of never having lost an important murder case was at last to be shattered. It meant a tremendous blow to his pride and his prestige.

A discreet tap at the door aroused him from his baffled musings, and his Japanese butler announced the presence of Jake Gottschalk, the theatrical manager, who with an air of privilege pushed on into the room, puffing an enormous black cigar—a roly-poly little man with the soul of an artist, and the speech and financial acumen of an old-clothes dealer.

"Hello, faker!" Atchison suavely greeted his visitor, rather welcoming the interruption, but not bothering himself to rise. There was no necessity of ceremony or pose between these two. They had known each other since the lean days of their roving youth when they had followed together the street fairs of the nineties, one as an aspiring juggler, the other as impresario of a two-headed calf.

"Faker, yourself!" gibed back the manager. "And, what is more, you should be losing your eyesight. That Ming vase you bought last week! Ming? Ha-ha. Like I am Jane Cowl yet."

"'Jealousy is cruel as the grave,'" quoted Atchison unctuously. "'And as the crackling of thorns under a pot is the laughter of a fool.' Don't fret

over my eyesight, Jake. Better look to your own."

As he spoke he caught up from the table beside him an antique coin, a silver denarius of the time of Nero, and passed it rapidly from one hand to the other in a series of bewildering moves, causing it to appear and disappear between his supple fingers. Atchison had never lost his early predilection for sleight of hand, and was a member of the Society of American Magicians, that curious organization which includes not only performers but senators, clergymen, staid business leaders and professional men of all kinds.

"Where is the coin now?" he finally asked, holding up both palms empty.

"On the back of your right hand," hazarded Gottschalk, squinting through a haze of cigar smoke.

"Wrong," Atchison chuckled, turning his right hand about, and then with his left plucking the denarius deftly from the tail of the cat.

"Not so bad," granted Jake grudgingly. "You still could get a job maybe on the small time."

They fell then to squabbling amicably over the value of various pieces in each other's collections; but Atchison could see that his companion's real interest was on something outside of pottery and glass and sculpture. This was no mere casual visit.

"What's on your mind, Jake?" he asked at last. "What is it you want?"

The manager hesitated a moment, puffing at his cigar; then dragged his chair across the floor, scattering ashes heedlessly over the costly Persian rug.

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"Listen!" His eyes rounded excitedly. "I got a play, Atchison—that is, I got a option on it—a big play. Just the sort of thing I've always wanted to do. And sure fire, y'understand. You can have a piece of it, if you want to."

"Yes?" Atchison's tone was more encouraging. A share in one of Gottschalk's productions was generally a profitable investment.

"Only"—Jake deprecatingly spread out his hands—"well, no use beating around the bush, there's only one woman can play it. It's a part that's like it was made for her, y'know. And think what a come-back we could make of it. All this publicity isn't going to do her any harm."

Atchison's face, which had relaxed since the other's arrival, knitted again into heavy lines.

"Myra Winslow, you mean?"

"You said it." Jake nodded eagerly. "It's her, I tell you—I can see her in every line of it—her and no one else. Without her, I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole.

"But," he laid his hand ingratiatingly on the lawyer's knee. "I ain't buying any pigs in a bag, y'understand. Everybody says you'll get her off somehow; Atchison always has an ace up his sleeve, he never loses. Still, before I close the option, I thought I'd better ask you—confidential, and not for publication of course—and make sure."

The frown deepened on Atchison's forehead, and he sat for a moment without answering, stroking the sleeping cat in his lap. When at last he

spoke, there was a bitter twist to his wide, flexible mouth.

"I have been trying vainly all day," he said, "to induce the district attorney to accept a plea of guilty of second-degree murder. That shows you what I—what both of us—think of her chances."

"H'm!" Jake's face mirrored a staggering disappointment. He contemplated the tip of his cigar and, crushing it out in an ash tray, slid his short legs to the floor. "Well, that's that," he sighed. "I guess I'll be going." But halfway to the door he halted. "I'd even take a gamble on it, Atchison," he ventured. "Ain't there as good as a fifty-fifty break?"

But again the lawyer gave a wearily negative gesture. "I'm afraid, Jake, the lady is definitely booked for another engagement."

Alone with his problem once more, that bitter twist did not leave Atchison's lips. Gottschalk's visit, instead of relieving his depression, had only served to intensify it. Everybody was expecting him to work a miracle. "Atchison always has an ace up his sleeve," they were saying. "He never fails." And he had nothing, nothing.

Sitting there as the night wore on, he desperately reviewed his bag of tricks—the ruses, the feints, the legal technicalities, the appeals to sentiment, the wiles of voice and manner and gesture he had used in the past—and gloomily shook his head. None of these would serve him here. He lapsed into deeper and deeper dejection.

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The cat in his lap stirred and twitched in its sleep. Perhaps it dreamed of some hunting foray, or of a bout with an enemy; for suddenly one velvet paw swept out, and its unsheathed claws raked across the back of Atchison's hand.

With a startled exclamation the lawyer sprang to his feet, dumping Selim unceremoniously to the floor, and reached for his handkerchief to stanch the blood welling from the scratches. Then he paused to stare at them, fascinated.

He raised his head, considering, as a quick light leaped to his eyes; and turning briskly to his library shelves he consulted several ponderous volumes. Apparently satisfied with what he found, he put the books back in their places, and called Gottschalk on the telephone.

"Take up your option, Jake," he advised; "and hold a quarter interest in the production for me. I'll send you a check to cover it in the morning."

"But—but," the manager stammered. "What has happened? You said——"

"What I said doesn't count," Atchison laughed blandly. "The public says that Atchison never loses; and the public, Jake, is always right. Vox populi, vox Dei."

He hung up the receiver; and coaxing back Selim, who had stalked off under a chair in stiff-legged dudgeon, with ears laid back, restored him to his knee, and banished worry from his mind. He was ready for his joust with the blind goddess.

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! The judge was on the bench; the jury chosen and in the box; the prisoner at the bar.

"If Your Honor please, and gentlemen of the jury," said the district attorney in outlining his case, "I shall sketch very briefly for you the main features of this sordid affair. A sordid affair in truth; for in the story as it unfolds to you from the lips of the witnesses I shall call, you will find little of human nature except at its basest and most unworthy.

"Myra Winslow, the defendant here," his glance veered toward the quietly-dressed, haggard but still beautiful woman seated beside Atchison at the counsel table, "was a half dozen years ago a rising actress with her name in electric lights above the doors of leading theaters. Adulation and applause turned her head. She turned capricious, exacting, uncertain; and after she had flouted her audiences by refusing on several occasions to appear, managers would no longer employ her.

"Drifting into that hectic, modern night life of Broadway, she became one of its most familiar figures. Her ethical standards deteriorated. Instead of using her talents and her charm to entertain the public, she devoted them to the arts of the gold digger.

"Finally young Paul Barber fell into her toils. He was a lad but twenty years old, delicate, impressionable, the heir to a considerable fortune; she a hardened, calculating woman of the world,

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growing a trifle shopworn, but still with the glamour of her past success about her.

"She induced the infatuated boy to marry her; but, owing to the fact that he was still under age, his brother and guardian, Mr. Amos Barber, succeeded in having the marriage annulled.

"But the woman, realizing her fading powers of attraction, did not propose to let so promising a victim slip from her clutches. She kept secretly in touch with Paul, and on the day before his twenty-first birthday persuaded him to marry her again.

"He was really in no condition to exercise a rational judgment in the matter. His none too virile constitution weakened by the dissipation in which she encouraged him, he was not only neurasthenic, but had also developed a valvular affection of the heart which made his certain demise a matter of a few months at the most.

"Her idea was undoubtedly to profit by his demise, and as his widow inherit his estate; for, in order to forestall any interference on the part of Paul's family or friends, she made every effort to keep their second marriage secret, and spirited him away to an obscure apartment on the West Side which she had taken under an assumed name.

"However, Mr. Amos Barber traced the pair to their hiding place and there a stormy scene ensued. Mr. Barber found his brother in a pitiable state, ill, confused, apparently in terror of the woman he had married and completely under her domination. When he endeavored to persuade Paul to

leave her and come with him, she snatched a pistol from a drawer and threatened to shoot them both if Paul attempted to go. Then at the point of her weapon she ordered Mr. Barber from the apartment.

"He went. Unwilling to abandon the unfortunate boy, though, he returned to the flat to renew his appeal to Paul; and in view of the Winslow woman's violent behavior when he was there before he took the precaution of having a policeman accompany him.

"They found the door locked on their arrival, and their repeated knocking met with no response; but at last, on demand of the officer, the actress admitted them. She was either in real or pretended hysterics, and showed signs of having been through a recent struggle. The negligee she wore was torn almost off one shoulder, and there was a deep scratch on her arm from which the blood was running down over her fingers.

"On the floor at the right of the door lay the body of Paul Barber, shot through the heart. He was fully dressed and wearing his hat and overcoat as if he had been about to go out; but his collar and tie were wrenched loose, indicating that he too had been engaged in a scuffle. On the table, six feet away from him, was the pistol which had killed him—the same pistol with which Myra Winslow had threatened him and Amos shortly before—and the white table cover on which it lay was flecked with drops of blood as if from the scratch on her arm. The door, as I have said, was

locked when Amos Barber and the policeman arrived, the windows all closed and fastened; there was no one else in the apartment, and no indication of any other person having been there since Amos Barber left.

"The Winslow woman when asked for an explanation of the tragedy told conflicting stories. Her first version was that Paul had committed suicide, and she produced in verification of this a letter which was in effect a suicide agreement, signed both by him and herself. The letter was, however, wholly in her handwriting, and Paul's signature a mere, wavering scrawl, which suggested that he might not have been cognizant of what he was signing.

"Confronted with the further circumstances that the shot had been fired at a distance of at least five feet from him, that although death must have been instantaneous, the pistol was on the table far out of his reach, and that both of them showed signs of having been in a desperate tussle, she changed to a different and more elaborate recital.

"Apprehensive, she said, that his brother would have him incarcerated in a lunatic asylum, Paul, after Amos's departure, had gone almost beside himself with panic, and in a frenzy of revolt had attempted to throw himself out of the window. Seeking by any means to quiet and compose him, she had suggested the suicide agreement, and then, as he grew calmer, convinced him that a better plan was to steal away and hide. He was doubtful

of the feasibility of it, certain that Amos would manage somehow to get hold of him; but she finally succeeded in persuading him to try it, and got him dressed and ready to start. Then, leaving him for a few moments, she went to another room to make her own toilet, and while there she heard the sound of a shot.

"Startled, she rushed back to him to see what had happened, and in her haste caught the loose, flowing sleeve of her negligee on the doorknob, ripping it almost off her and throwing her against a sharp corner of the latch so as to inflict the scratch on her arm.

"Heedless of this, though, she raced on into the front room to find Paul stretched out there on the floor. She had no other idea, she says, but that he had carried out his threat to kill himself, and in the horror and tumult of her feelings, that conviction was still firmly fixed when she admitted the policeman and Amos Barber. But later, as her mind cleared, she recalled that when she entered the room, she had noted the outer door of the flat was standing open, and had caught a vague impression—hardly as much as that—of someone disappearing through it. Automatically, she says, she digressed on her way toward Paul to slam the door shut and lock it. Then she flung herself down beside the body and, realizing that the boy was dead, passed into a sort of grief-stricken coma from which she was only aroused by the continued knocking at the door.

"This," said the district attorney, "is her story.

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But it is possible, I think, to reconstruct from the known facts a much more accurate picture of what took place in that flat of hers after the departure of Amos Barber.

"She was, remember, a desperate woman playing for her final stake. If she could keep Paul under her dominion for a few months, perhaps even less, her nest would be feathered. She had then but to present her wedding certificate, and lay claim to his estate. And it was her last chance. Let him go? Never.

"If Your Honor please, and gentlemen of the jury, I believe that after the departure of Amos, Paul, awakened to a more normal perception by the arguments of his brother, announced his intention of quitting her. Naturally she protested and pleaded with him; but when she saw her efforts were in vain, and with a relentless alternative fixed in her mind, she induced him by some ruse to sign the suicide agreement, if indeed his signature is not a forgery. That was to be her defense. I charge that when she wrote that paper, murder was in her heart; and that when Paul stood by his determination she unhesitatingly carried her dark purpose into effect.

"But she had not time to set her stage fully before she was interrupted by the knocking of the policeman on the door. Faced then by the many discrepancies between her story and the obvious facts, she attempted to harmonize them by this wildly improbable tale of the open door, and the suggestion of an intruder.

"But it doesn't hold water, gentleman. That sleeve of hers was not torn on a doorknob, or the scratch inflicted on her arm by the jagged end of a latch. That was done by the sharp corner of a ring worn by Paul Barber, as shown by the fact that this ring was jerked down by some pull to the second joint of his finger. Paul Barber certainly did not commit suicide. The nature of the wound and the fact that the pistol was lying on the table half a dozen feet away from him definitely establish that. The woman's fingerprints were the only ones found upon the weapon. Hers was unmistakably the hand that shot him.

"In view of all the circumstances then, and upon the plain evidence of premeditation as indicated by the alleged suicide pact, I can ask on behalf of the people nothing less, gentlemen, than a verdict against Myra Winslow of murder in the first degree."

The lawyers inside the railing glanced uncertainly at Atchison. There were many telling points in the district attorney's exposition to which he could properly have objected. Ordinarily he would have been on his feet at almost every word, thundering his protests. But he had sat through it like a tongue-tied tyro without once lifting his voice, literally allowing his client to be crucified in advance. What was his game? What advantage did he hope to gain from such abject passivity?

And their bewilderment was not lessened as the case proceeded, and the prosecutor buttressed up the assertions he had made with the testimony of

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his various witnesses, while Atchison still remained a study in inaction.

With only one point did the defendant's attorney seem at all concerned—how Amos Barber had been dressed on the night of the murder. Of the patrolman who accompanied him to the flat, and of all others who had seen him that evening he inquired with the utmost particularity what sort of suit Mr. Barber had worn, what sort of overcoat, what sort of shoes, what sort of hat, what sort of gloves, what sort of tie.

"What is this?" the district attorney sarcastically interrupted, when Atchison started on this line of interrogation for about the fourth time with the police captain of the precinct. "A murder trial, or a disquisition upon what the well-dressed man should wear?"

There was a snicker in the court-room, but Atchison proceeded unperturbed with his questions:

"What sort of suit did he have on, Captain?"

"Dark brown, I think."

"And what sort of overcoat?"

"Also brown."

"Hat?"

"A soft brown felt."

"Tie?"

"I couldn't say definitely as to that. My impression is that it was a brown and yellow striped four-in-hand."

"Did he wear gloves?"

"Yes, sir. Tan suède."

"On both hands?"

"Of course. Or, no; come to think of it, I can't swear to that. He had his right hand in his overcoat pocket. I remember that, because when we shook hands he gave me his left."

"Ah? He kept his right hand in his overcoat pocket, and shook hands with his left? Why?"

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps he is left-handed."

"It wasn't because he had a gun in that overcoat pocket, was it?"

"I don't know, sir. I couldn't say."

"You didn't search him for a gun then?"

"We did not."

The jury and spectators stirred impatiently. This was too palpably a red herring drawn across the trail. The gun with which Paul Barber was killed had been lying on the table; and, anyhow, Amos had not arrived on the scene until after the murder.

Nevertheless, Atchison followed the same futile line of inquiry when the elder brother himself took the stand, quite disregarding all that damning testimony with which Amos substantiated the story given in the prosecutor's opening speech.

Finally he said:

"Let me see your hands, please."

The witness hesitated a moment; then extended them.

"I observe that you have grown a new nail on the little finger of your right hand. When did you lose the old one?"

"Some time last winter. I caught my hand in the

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door of my car. It was after the death of my brother."

"That is all," said Atchison unexpectedly; and the witness stepped down.

With that the prosecution rested; and so rapid had been the action of the trial, owing to the laxity of the defense, that the entire case for the people had been presented in a single day.

As court adjourned for the night a buzz of disgusted comment broke out among the spectators. They felt cheated. Atchison, the spectacular, had failed them. The consensus was that the great advocate had simply thrown up his hands in the face of a certain verdict against him, and was relying upon a later appeal to executive clemency to save his client from the chair. Jake Gottschalk was so disheartened by the expressions he heard all about him that he crept glumly out of the courtroom without so much as a glance at his old friend.

A few trusting souls there were who still believed that Atchison would spring one of his celebrated surprises during the course of the defense—produce a rabbit from the hat, so to speak—but even these were silenced when he closed the next day, without any new developments, after putting a single witness on the stand—the defendant herself.

She did not make a bad showing on direct examination. Under Atchison's expert guidance, aided by her own skill as an actress, she appeared a wistful, distinctly appealing figure as she described her life and her association with Paul Barber.

She made no attempt to minimize or excuse herself for the prodigality with which she had wasted her opportunities. Then she paused.

"I wanted another chance." Her deep, lovely voice thrilled through the courtroom. "I was so weary of herding with the husks and swine. The managers were unwilling to trust me. But Paul had promised me, when he came into his money, to back me in a fresh start on the stage."

"Yet that was not your sole incentive in marrying him?" prompted Atchison.

"No. Oh, no."

"You loved him?"

"What is love?" A tender, madonna-like smile curved her lips. "He was ill, lonely, unhappy when I met him, recklessly throwing his life away. I knew that I could help him. I knew, in spite of what the doctors said, that I could nurse him back to health and strength, if I had him solely to myself.

"He was forlorn, sick; craving affection more than anything on earth. Derelict though I was, he needed me. No woman with a spark of the maternal in her could have resisted the appeal. If that be love, Mr. Atchison," her voice quivered and broke, "yes, I loved Paul Barber."

"That is all," said Atchison softly. "Take the witness."

The actress did not stand up at all well on her cross-examination. She appeared nervous, frightened, unsure of herself. So it was a relief to everybody when her ordeal was finally con-

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cluded, and the prosecutor, making no effort to conceal his satisfaction, told her she might step down.

"Er—just a moment." Atchison raised his hand to stay her. "In that interview between them at the apartment, did Amos Barber voice a threat of any kind against Paul?"

"Yes. Paul had said something about being a free man the next day, able to control his own money; and his brother answered him with an ugly laugh. 'You'll never touch a penny of that money except through me,' he told Paul. 'Try it, and I'll railroad you into a booby hatch or, if necessary, into a coffin'."

This ended the defense; and Atchison, anxiously watching the district attorney to see what he would do, hurriedly shaded his eyes with his hand to hide the gleam of elation that slid into them as announcement was made that Amos Barber would be called in rebuttal. The prosecutor was walking into the net that had been laid for him.

"Did you make any such statement as you have heard ascribed to you?" Barber was asked.

"I did not."

"Did you think it?" asked Atchison.

"No; not in any sense injurious to my brother. In order to save him from this woman, I was willing to have him placed under temporary restraint."

"Yet in view of his prospects for an early demise you as his sole heir had a natural expectation of

coming into his property within a short time, did you not—unless he married?”

“I never gave a thought to that phase of the matter, sir.”

“What is the present condition of your brother’s estate?”

“Intact, and in excellent shape.”

“What is the condition of your own estate?”

Over strenuous objection from the other side, the witness was finally instructed to answer; and in response to Atchison’s probing reluctantly admitted that, owing to heavy losses in the past two years, he was rather seriously involved.

“But with your brother’s estate to fall back on that doesn’t make much difference?” suggested Atchison.

“I have never touched a penny of my brother’s property,” snapped Barber angrily.

“Perhaps not. Nevertheless, the mere handling of so extensive a property must have been of distinct advantage to you?”

Barber simply tossed his head, without answering.

“To lose control of it, and the anticipated reversion of it to yourself, would have been a staggering blow to you, would it not?”

Again Barber declined to answer.

“Will you still swear, then, that, with such a vital consideration in your mind, you did not in the heat of argument give voice to the threat Miss Winslow has reported, or to some similar expression?”

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"I said nothing of the kind," declared Barber through his set teeth.

"Will you swear," thundered Atchinson, "that, with such a vital consideration in your mind, you did not on your departure from that apartment purposely leave the door unlocked, and returning enter when the coast was clear with the intention of taking your brother away by force; and that when he resisted, tearing your glove in the struggle, and crushing the nail on your little finger, you did not shoot him, and then, descending to the street, hunt up a patrolman, and with the pretense that you had just come from downtown ask him to accompany you to the apartment?"

The district attorney was shouting objections at the top of his voice; but Atchison had the lead on him, and got the question fully out and heard by the jury before the court could interpose.

Barber went white and then red and then white again as the accusation was hurled at him; and sat tensely gripping the arms of his chair.

"You need not answer that, Mr. Barber," instructed the judge.

"I prefer to." Barber flung up his head haughtily. "I deny the charge absolutely and in toto. There is not a word of truth in it."

"That is all, then." Atchison bowed graciously. And with a glare of offense at him the witness stepped down and started over toward his seat.

But as he passed the corner of the counsel table Myra Winslow, who had sat a composed and stoic

figure throughout the trial, suddenly sprang at him, her eyes blazing, her lips drawn back from her white teeth.

"Liar! Murderer!" she flung at him; and sweeping her curved fingers out in a leopard stroke raked her nails down across his cheek.

Atchison, marvelously quick on his feet, was instantly between them, thrusting the woman back, proffering apologies to Barber, jerking out his own handkerchief to wipe the blood from the scratches.

Barber, muttering a curse, pushed him roughly away, and moved on to his chair; and Atchison started to return the blood-streaked handkerchief to his pocket, but paused before he did so as if at a sudden suggestion, and with a dramatic gesture flung it down instead upon the counsel table.

"If Your Honor please," he said, "I wish to place this handkerchief in evidence, and ask for an analysis and comparison of the blood spots on it and those on the table cover to determine if they are not both from the same person."

As he spoke his eyes were fixed steadfastly on Amos Barber; and although Barber attempted to meet that gaze with sneering defiance he was unable to do so. In spite of himself, his own eyes shifted and wavered like those of a trapped animal.

Then the steel-like composure he had maintained buckled and cracked.

His throat moved convulsively. A ghastly, gray pallor swept up across his face, bringing into livid relief the scarlet scratches on his cheek. He

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clenched his hands in a futile effort to recover his self-control—and broke.

"You devil!" he shouted hoarsely across at Atchison. "You led me on with your 'possum tactics, didn't you, to prepare the way for this? I'll bet you've rehearsed this whole scene a dozen times, you and that hell-cat you're defending. And I might have known you'd think of those blood spots on the table cover. Yes, I did it, if you want the satisfaction of knowing—did it just as you described. And, now lock me up." He held out his hands to the officers who were approaching him. "Take me away—anywhere, so that I can get rid of the sight of his fat, complacent face."

Atchison sat that night in the chair that had once belonged to Richelieu, a stack of evening papers beside him all blazoning his triumph in front-page headlines. His supremacy was restored, his genius everywhere acclaimed. His expression was a happy one.

Thoughtfully fingering his full chin and turning his classic profile toward the light, he glanced across at Jake Gottschalk.

"Jake," he said, "was I as good as they say I was?"

The manager blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "Well," he grunted, "I could have staged that scene better, if you'd asked me. But you acted very fair, for a amateur."

"That wasn't acting," denied Atchison. "That was mental sleight of hand."

"Yes," Gottschalk nodded: "I guess you kind of played it on Barber. One of the newspaper boys, Bloomer on the Gazette, was telling me how that blood test ain't no good. He says you can't identify two samples of a man's blood taken six months apart; not positively."

Atchison smiled. "Authorities differ on it, I grant you," he said. "Yet, with the rapid march of science to-day, who can speak positively on any point?"

"And that, Jake," he explained, "is what I relied on to catch Barber. Like the conjurer with his audience, I led him to expect one thing, and surprised him with another. I hammered away at his gloves as if intending to raise the question of fingerprints, and then suddenly flashed the blood-stained handkerchief at him. If I had asked for a sample of his blood, he would have been prepared and have withstood me; but taken without warning, and bluffed by my air of assurance, he caved. Simply an adaptation of an old trick, Jake; mental sleight of hand."

"Well, they've got to give you credit, anyhow," commented the manager, puffing at his cigar. "Absolutely."

"No," disclaimed Atchison, smiling; "I pass the laurel wreath to another." He rang the bell for the butler. "Bring a saucer of cream for Selim," he ordered; "he has earned it."

THE LITTLE DRY STICKS

By
Faraday Keene

IT WAS the bitterest of winter afternoons. The earth was iron, the fierce wind had an unearthly acrid keenness that was like an actual smell in our flinching nostrils as they drew it in. The deserted roads and fields—for the day was Sunday—were desolate beyond the natural desolateness of the day and hour. "Fine day for a tramp," grunted our host sarcastically, and yet with a trace of amusement in his deep pleasant voice. Pelham and I, with our heads hunched against the blast, grunted back, but without the amusement; after all, these people over the hill were his friends and not ours. And until Danby's small car balked and refused to start in the cold,

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we had expected to drive. "And to think," wheezed young Pelham, between his attempts to blow upon stiffening fingers, "that the three of us would be sitting this minute in front of a blazing fire if Danby weren't such a ladies' man."

Danby, well known as the most considerate of hosts, and certainly not a lady's man at all, would have had a right to resent this saucy speech from anybody but Pelham. Pelham spent his young life ragging his elders, in the most affectionate way in the world, and as if nobody, however honored and famed, however gray-haired or otherwise reverend, was a day over twenty-five years old; and in consequence he was scolded and loved and invited everywhere. He was, in those happy days, of which that day of our winter walk was the very last, the delight of us all. And his own particular delight as admiration was Danby.

Danby now said, with his habitual lazy amusement, "I told you both to stay at home, you young cub."

"And we rejoined," said Pelham, "that we were better men than you, and would prove it, if we froze our ears off." This contingency really seemed not unlikely to me, as my numbed feet stumbled on the bars of the gate we were climbing. "Moreover," said Pelham, as he followed, "when it's a case of beauty in distress——"

"She's not a beauty, and she's not in distress," retorted Danby.

"About the beauty, that's as it may be," said our young friend, "and as I still hope to see the lady,

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please heaven, before my eyeballs are totally congealed, I'll judge of that for myself. But any lady is in distress, whether she knows it or not, who calls for practical advice upon a scientific man."

Danby, the eminent scientist, grunted.

"The scientific mind," declared young Pelham, skipping from frozen clod to clod in that wicked cold, as we cut across the field, "functions without the human touch. No link with life. And it's always spilling the beans."

"The links of life," said Danby coolly, "are all scientific. Every darn one of 'em."

"You don't follow me, really you don't," said Pelham. "It distresses me, Danby, to see how you're losing your grip."

Danby's eye, turned indulgently on the audacious youth, was the eye of an adult police dog taking in a Sealyham pup. But deep down in it glimmered the look of a childless man at the youth he would have liked for a son. Danby was not married. Women liked the superficial brutality of his face, men loved the sensitiveness, seldom glimpsed, under his disillusioned ways. Pelham worshiped him. His days at Danby's tiny place in the country, to which so few of us were ever asked, were the happiest days of his life. Danby was celebrated to the world's ends, and poor as only a very celebrated scientist can be poor. His delightful shabby sitting room, his one manservant, his plain food and wonderful cigars, remain in my mind as part of a time that was too good to last. We wished for his invitations; if we got one we

bragged. "Down at Redoaks, Sunday. Danby's place, you know. Yes, *the* Danby. The chemist."

There were seldom any women, young or old. But women liked Danby; they always invited him, and sometimes he went. He could be a good friend to women.

That this was so, our present bleak expedition was proof. We were taking it because a certain Mrs. Elderson, unknown to either of us, had asked our host to advise her, and he had not refused. I was prepared to find her a disagreeable woman; any woman who would drag a man out in such a wind as this—for the day and hour were of her own choosing—must have, if there was any justice in heaven, a sharp voice and a No. 9 shoe. Decidedly, our course across the fields was not improving my temper. The short cut, chosen to avoid the sweep of wind on the bare highroad, was certainly no warmer, and was devilish rough under foot. Pelham, however, was undepressed.

"Our honored host," he said, "is in a bad way. Can't follow a train of thought. Let's see if I can put it in words of one syllable. You saw that play, *Interference*?"

We had all seen it.

"The hero is a doctor. You remember, after the murder, how all the clews are faked to save the suspected person?"

We remembered.

"And just then, when the police and everybody have been put quite off the scent—when the plant is within a hair's breadth of working like a charm

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—the scientific mind observes, and tells the police, that the supper tray of the left-handed lady has been set the wrong way round! Great work! And it brings suspicion down instantly—bang!—on the very person whom the doctor wants to protect.”

Danby smiled maliciously; Pelham had made one slip. “The unidentified faculty used by journalists in those crises when other people employ their minds,” said Danby, “seems in your case to function quite normally. You’ve got everything right except the single detail that makes the whole thing wrong. The person who spills those particular beans in that play, by pointing out the discrepancy to the police—I’m sorry, Pelham—is the newspaper man. And here, thank the Lord, is the gate!”

The gate was a wooden affair, gray for want of paint; it hung between handsome stone posts grown over with vines. The edges of the drive were furred with brittle skeletons of weeds. The air of almost cynical neglect that overhung Mrs. Elderson’s acres of ground did not prepare me for the aspect of the house, which rose above us on its knoll; as we approached it, the whole effect of it, even in that winter twilight, was clear and bright. Even the leafless vines of the porch were vines that had been tended and trimmed. It had been painted—not indeed very lately, but lately enough. Its broad low roof, unlike the roof of the summer-house on the lawn, had an unpatched and perfect sweep. The glass of its front windows, not yet lighted, was polished glass; it was not dull, it

gleamed. And having already confessed my feeling against the instigator of our comfortless walk, I will further own that by this time my prejudice went farther; I began to get a distinctly unpleasant impression from this contrast between the house and its grounds. That smiling house, rising out of an unkempt lawn and a ruined garden, looked to me like a callous castaway on a tiny raft, leaving everything around it to drown.

Meantime, as we mounted the drive, Danby himself lamented the state of the grounds, outward sign of a restriction of income that he had already mentioned to us. It was his particular reason for wishing to help this lady. Her husband, stricken in years, had lately muddled away a lot of money; she was taking things over in the hope of saving what remained.

"I hope," said Danby, "that the house won't have to be sold. Mrs. Elderson planned it herself, and it's charming. Just look at this end."

He led us to the right, round the corner, to a side that was invisible from the drive, and even to my chilled senses the house was all that he said. Every aspect of it had charm and character. Suddenly he shivered loudly in my ear. "Brrrr! Trust a woman to be ventilating something, even if it's in Greenland! This temperature must be close to nothing at all—and look at that window. Wide open!"

"Women," said Pelham, shivering in sympathy as we followed our host up the steps to the front door, "don't realize that air is no good in the

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winter till it's aged in the wood." And till it is warmed, I thought, bringing up the rear. Well warmed. Steam heat—wood fires—hot whisky punch——

Such were my thoughts when, before we had time to ring, the door opened. A lady, becomingly hatted and wrapped, stood on the threshold. But my first pleasant impression was submerged in shocked dismay when she stepped outside the door and closed it behind her. There were introductions and handshakes and compliments on our promptness. We already knew that we were to inspect a field where she was asked to allow the passage of a transmission line. We now learned that she had forestalled our ringing of the bell that her husband might not be disturbed; she had listened for steps on the porch. Mr. Elderson, who was far from strong, was having his afternoon nap in the library; he would see us when we came back again for tea. And while we stood there, I for one almost ready to cry with cold, Mrs. Elderson stepped down from the porch.

Now for his own somewhat heartless feeling about the events of that afternoon, Pelham, even in his deepest distress, could account quite naturally afterward. "To think," he said, "that if Danby's car had been running that day I might have liked her from the first!" The boy is right. If we had alighted warm from a snug car we should have welcomed the notion of getting our short cold walk over before we settled down to tea and a fire. But even a short cold walk, on top of a long cold

one, was an appalling prospect. Sullenly we followed her. Only the thickness of a door between us and a warm room—even the hall—even three minutes in a warm hall— As Pelham says, not even Danby should have expected us to sympathize with the misfortunes of a lady who had made on us, however innocently and thoughtlessly, such a painful first impression. "Consideration for husbands is all very well," growled Pelham to me, "but even the unmarried male is human. What harm would it have done her to lend me a blanket?" He hunched himself in his thin overcoat.

Danby, striding along, vigorous and glowing, in the big rough canvas-and-sheepskin coat that he used for winter walks, seemed to think that the blood coursed just as freely under our inadequate city clothes. We were all for haste, and he hardly hurried at all; he seemed to think that we enjoyed his friend Mrs. Elderson as much as he did himself. And heaven knows that under a more propitious star I, too, might have liked her very well. Clearly, she was younger than her husband, whom Danby described as elderly if not old. She was slim and erect and still blonde, I judged—not artificially, or very discreetly so. Her dress was the dress of a lady quite capable of designing such a charming house.

I thought her nervous and a little hard, but she had fascination; that I could feel it at all that day proves that it was great indeed. We reached the site of the proposed transmission line, and over this business she was kind enough not to linger, and

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I began to bless her. By this time the wind was like a knife. After all, she needed only to be assured that the line would not injure the property, which she might yet be obliged to sell; and we reassured her with one voice. The spot was ten minutes' walk from the house; she had brought us round by a rather longer way, to show us the winter sunset from the hill, but by the very shortest path—so Danby told us—the distance was a ten-minute walk, if you walked rapidly. We agreed that Mrs. Elderson might grant the easement, for the sum that was offered her, with no misgivings whatever.

"Thank you," she said heartily, adding with almost violent frankness, "I have many uses for the money. Too many." There was a queer little silence. I was surprised that she did not now without delay turn our steps toward the house and tea. Instead, she stood for a moment without saying anything; she might almost have been thought to hesitate. She broke a little stick that she held between her hands.

"I would take a bet," said Danby, who was watching her with a more indulgent smile than was natural to his rather saturnine features—or indeed, I remember thinking rather testily, to the features of any man whom the lady regarded was keeping out-of-doors in a very cold wind—"that you have at some time in your life done a great deal of camping."

She looked surprised, but nodded. "At one time I spent many months of the year in that way. With

my first husband." She spoke briefly; her first marriage had been a failure; we knew that she spoke of it very seldom. "How did you guess?"

"In the way that Pelham says a scientist never guesses." He chuckled cheerfully at Pelham. "Through interest in the human life about me." Pelham opened his mouth and shut it again. Of course this was not what he had said at all, but he did not want a discussion out here in the fields; he wanted a speedy start for a warm room and some tea. So he held his peace. Danby went on. "On several occasions when I have walked with you I have noticed that you have a habit of picking up very small sticks, and carrying them in your hand as you walk. Sometimes when I have parted from you I have noticed you walking away from me still holding the little stick you have chosen; sometimes I have even seen you with two or three sticks at a time—holding them, playing with them. You pick up sticks at all times, as if it were a habit, but the ones that you keep and carry in your hand are always very short and very dry. And this unconscious principle of choice I attribute to your experience in the woods. You have the eye of the practiced woodsman choosing sticks for a quick fire."

She said quietly, "You are perfectly right,"—said it even with the thin ghost of a smile. But she was very pale. Clearly he had reminded her of something that she did not like to remember. "It is a good thing," she said, "that on this bitter day we do not need to depend on anything I may pick

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up. A fire of logs is waiting for us at the house, and you must want your tea—which very carelessly I failed to order. Let us lose no more time.” But in the same moment, just turning toward the way by which we had come, she stopped. “I hate to ask—but if you would do me one more favor, all three of you! Would you follow the surveyor’s stakes to the corner of our land and tell me if I must consent to sacrifice the big elm? If it’s absolutely necessary?”

Her voice was pleading. Her face, still pale in the dim light, was pleading too. Obediently we turned back, but Mrs. Elderson did not turn with us. “I must see about the tea. You’ll forgive me? The stakes are quite plain; I’m sure you’ll be no more than twenty minutes after me.” I told myself grimly that we should be less than twenty if I had my way. . . . all the more that the lady herself, vanishing between the cedar hedges on her way back to the house, was walking very slowly indeed as she disappeared. Almost strolling. What right had a lady, when three of her fellow creatures were freezing in her service, to feel warm enough to walk as slowly as that?

As for us, our pace was anything but leisurely. We walked as fast as freezing men, eager for shelter, would naturally walk, and our inspection of the threatened elm was brief indeed, for the tree seemed to us not to be threatened at all.

An old negress of a cooklike appearance opened to us and spoke to Danby by name; one inferred the waitress’s afternoon out. The hall was warm

and bright, and the welcoming voice of Mrs. Elderson descended to us from above. She stood by the railing of the wide gallery, upstairs, and over it she looked down at us, still holding her hat in her hand. "I'm ashamed not to be ready; I should have walked faster. Will you join my husband in the library?" She indicated the still unlighted room on the right of the hall. "I haven't been in to wake him, but it's time he was waked. If you'll just switch the light on—Mr. Danby knows the place. I'll be down—" Her voice trailed away into sanctuaries of the toilette, and we opened the library door.

Out of the dark, we were met by a wave of heat. My thought was: "The old chap must be very old indeed if he likes it like this." For even to my ill-used frame, still craving warmth, the room was unpleasantly hot. Danby found the button, he touched it. We saw a small, comfortable room with deep chairs. A very low fire, burned down to redness, was before us on the hearth, and in front of it, in the deepest chair of all, an old man in such a strange attitude that I think I knew instantly he would never change it. Mr. Elderson, fallen over sideways in his comfortable chair, was dead. He had been robbed, and stabbed through the heart.

We were still at the gruesome business of establishing these primary facts, with no thought of how we should tell his wife, when an appalling screech and a crash of china from the door behind us testified to the sensitiveness of the cook. She

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fled in howling hysterics. Danby rose with a heart-felt curse; he had just time to catch Mrs. Elderson in the hall, rushing down. We heard him murmur something, then something else. Presently, over the ruins of the tea tray, he brought her in.

That was the time when I began to be ashamed of not having advised her before. Frightfully shaken, ashen-white, with trembling lips and hands, she was still plucky and cool. She told us how to get the sheriff and the doctor; when they came she helped us to check up the indications—unhappily so few—of how the deed was done. Her husband had been stabbed with a knife, and his pocketbook and watch were gone. Anyone might have entered the house; though the front door was locked, and the back door under the eye of the cook, the side door was unlocked. No footprints could be traced on the frozen ground; the dusk was deep enough to have hidden completely an intruder's escape. And apparently not a clew of any kind had been left behind.

We had got as far as this when Mrs. Elderson interrupted us with an uncontrollable cry. "It's my fault. I shouldn't have left him. You must tell me, I've got to know—surely he wasn't dead before I left the house?"

No. No indeed. The doctor could assure her of that.

"But then—if instead of dawdling—instead of walking home slowly, I had hurried—if I had even come straight to him when I got back, might I have been in time?" Her suspense, waiting for

his answer, was very moving to see. "How long has he—" Her voice failed suddenly and sank away, but her look kept on asking.

The doctor was evidently moved. "Mr. Elderson has been dead more than half an hour. He was dead sometime before you entered the house." He took courage. "Your husband's body is cold, it is even beginning to be stiff. From its temperature and rigidity, I should say that life has been extinct for not less than thirty and possibly for forty minutes. And in a room heated, as this is, almost to eighty degrees, the coagulation of blood for a wound is slow; that also gives us a measure."

She gasped. "Then, even if I had hurried—" I thought again of her composed figure, turning in between the cedars.

He shook his head. But she was somber again, and shivering. "If I hadn't gone. If only I hadn't. Think, Doctor Greene! At twenty minutes past four I left the house—I saw the kitchen clock when I went out to tell Agnes that my husband mustn't be disturbed—and these gentlemen came just after. At two minutes of five I came in again by the kitchen door, in order to tell Agnes at once about tea; I went up the back stairs, straight from the kitchen, in such haste that I was still giving directions as I went up, all the way to the top—and only a few minutes later Mr. Danby and his friends were back. Here we all were, I mean, in the house with my husband—before—and after. And such a short time between! I can never forgive myself." Her agitation choked her.

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But next moment, fortunately, she was in better hands than those of tongue-tied dumbly sympathizing males: two women neighbors arrived. Shedding tears at last—we noted it thankfully—she was borne away, and we were left to grind our teeth over the riddle on our hands.

We found nothing. Nothing. Pelham telephoned the facts to his newspaper, but there was little to say. The old negress was of course above suspicion; the other servants, chauffeur and maid, were in town for the day, and their movements could be checked. The sum of money taken was not large, and there was no reason to think that Mr. Elderson was believed to keep large sums on hand. The thing had the look of an impulsive crime, done on the spur of the moment when opportunity served, perhaps by a passing tramp. But no tramps had been seen passing.

A farmer, rattling homeward, had seen a car turn in at somebody's gate, in the dusk; it might have been the Eldersons' gate. A car could have come up unheard by the cook—bandits roamed in cars. The police also heard that the cook had been expecting a visit from her husband; but she swore—and telephone inquiries partly confirmed this—that he had never come at all. The investigators—by this time there were several—were more at a loss than ever. And the doctor rose to go.

"You don't think," Danby asked him, as we stood with him in the hall, "that Mrs. Elderson will worry herself ill?"

The doctor shook his head. "She'll feel better

about it presently." He eyed us briefly. "There's a special reason why she will stop worrying—as soon as she thinks of it. As soon as the shock passes, and she remembers. I dropped a word to her only a month ago, rather doubting my own wisdom at the time, but now I'm glad I did. Mr. Elderson had a progressive and quite incurable, though painless, disease; he was actually a doomed man, though of course he might have lived for years. And that—bad enough, you'll say, for him—would have been a hundred times worse for her. In cases like his, of course, every treatment is tried; a devoted wife like Mrs. Elderson couldn't have failed to try every one. The thing would have left her broken in health, and quite certainly impoverished. I understand their means have been reduced—in fact," said Doctor Greene, "candidly, I'm sorry it happened this way, but I'm thankful it happened!"

Pelham said to Danby, "I'm not going home with you. I'm staying here." To the officers he said, "I'm on the *Inquirer*. You don't mind?" It was news.

So we were to leave him there. We looked round the room.

"Foolish, I know," said Danby, in the involuntary hushed voice we were using, "but aren't you glad the old fellow was so comfortable when it—happened? Maybe he never knew at all, perhaps he was asleep. He was comfortable, he was warm, he had pulled his chair just where he wanted it—

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see? Only a man whose wife was out would have pushed up the rug like that."

A rueful smile was our tribute to the truth of this bit of observation. The chair, dragged or pushed along, had carried the rug with it in great careless folds over the smooth wood of the floor, in its approach to the fire. Yes, old Elderson had settled himself just where he wanted to be.

Danby and I had our dinner alone. It was useless, of course, but we talked and speculated and guessed till our tongues and our minds were tired, on and on—till we heard the slam of the gate. Then, in a moment, Pelham was in the room.

We didn't need to ask him; success was written on him. "You're too smart, you two," he said, but he was pleased. "You've guessed!"

"We've guessed that you think you have some news. Spill it!" I said.

"Did you say *some* news? I've got *the* news—the big news, all the news there is. And the credit," he said to Danby, "is yours." Then, as Danby stared, "My hat's off to the scientific mind, Danby. You pulled your stuff without a notion of what you were doing, of course. You've proved my case for me, there," he put in with irrepressible mischief, "up to the hilt. But it was your darned uncanny gift of observation that did the trick."

"What trick?"

"Ran the thing down. Caught the criminal—redhanded."

"My observation?" stuttered Danby.

"From the minute when you noticed the window

—mind if I stop to light?" He struck a match, he puffed, the cigar was off. "I say—let me tell it my own way, will you?" But Danby had to ask one question: "The window?"

"The one that was open—you remember? You noticed it, you pointed it out. Well—it was the library window!"

"You don't mean some one got in—had got in—*then*. But the doctor said——"

"No one got in—there. Lord, no! It isn't so simple as that. See here—do let me tell it my way!" We kept still.

"This is just how it happened: Elderson's murderer entered by the side door when the old man was of course alone in the house except for the cook dozing in the kitchen. Entered the house, entered the room where Elderson was sitting, and took him into the library."

"But Elderson was already," I cried, "in the library!"

"No. That's a mistake. He was napping by the dining-room fire."

"Then he was killed, and taken——"

"No. First taken, then killed." My mind had a picture of an old man gagged and struggling. "But why?"

"I'm coming to that. We got the reason why from the very first clew you gave us, Danby. The rug! You remember the rug—how it was all pushed up in folds?"

"But just as any rug would be," said Danby,

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as puzzled as I, "if a man drew his chair toward the fire."

"Excuse me. *Not* just as any rug would be. Those folds were not in front of the chair. They were on one side. The chair had been moved sideways, and not forward in the direction of the fire, at all. The chair had been moved toward the middle of the room from a position somewhere near the window. And at the time when it was moved—there was a heavy weight in it."

"Elderson?"

"Elderson, alive or dead. But most probably—in fact, certainly—quite dead."

"But, there's no sense in any of it," said Danby, pulling at his pipe.

"That's what we thought," said Pelham. "No sense at all. We thought we had not a clew in the world, not the ghost of one—and all at once, there at our feet, was something that cried aloud to be explained. Why had the chair moved sideways, and in a direction that brought it no nearer to the fire? And of course that made us look at the fire."

Pelham looked with shining eyes at Danby. "That's where your real stroke of genius came in! You'll get full credit. For that wasn't an ordinary fire at all, and after we had had a good look at it we looked around for what I remembered your mentioning out in the field—the little dry sticks that Mrs. Elderson habitually picked up to start her fires with. At last, not by the wood box, but by a deep cupboard to one side, we saw some dust of very dry bark, and we opened the cupboard door.

Well—the murderer of Mr. Elderson had opened it before us.”

“Fingerprints?” I said.

He shook his head. “We didn’t need them. The cupboard had apparently been quite full of Mrs. Elderson’s little sticks. And almost every one of them was gone.”

“Gone?”

“Of course, burned. You remember that the room was hot? I’ll tell you why. The reason flashed on me when I suddenly thought of your third clew, Danby—the window. When Elderson was stabbed, that little library was like Greenland. Elderson’s body was left by an open window in a chair, in a room that was freezing cold, for—well, we’ll say for as long as Elderson’s murderer dared. Then a fire was lighted—a roaring fire, that would bring the temperature up with a run, and fall to ashes—look like a burnt-out fire of logs. And at the last moment Elderson’s chair was pushed away from the window into a plausible position in the middle of the room; and as the chair was too heavy to lift, the rug was pushed before it in folds. In folds on one side. That’s the story, corroborated by confession, of Elderson’s murder.”

“The murderer’s really caught?” I said. “And confessed?”

“Confessed. After we found the knife.”

“But hold on! Hold on!” cried Danby. “What criminal in his senses would fool around with fires and windows after the thing was done?”

“You haven’t realized,” said Pelham, “the effect

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of extreme cold on a dead body. I mean, in the first moments of its being dead. A very short time under an open window in a temperature like that would coagulate blood. A body exposed like that would seem, if you came on it just afterward in a very warm room, to be the body of a person who had been dead longer than was actually the case."

"I see," said Danby. "By Jove, that's clever; it confuses the time, doesn't it? A man seen leaving a house at a certain moment wouldn't be connected with a crime—" Suddenly he stopped. "But see here, it works backwards! And it ought to work forward to do any good. For an alibi, I mean. The crime should have been made to look as if it happened later, not earlier.

"Say a man leaves a house at five. You don't connect him with a crime that occurred, or seems to have occurred, at five-ten. But you are darn likely to associate his movements with a murder committed at four fifty-five! Let's see how it works out, by the clock.

"Why, why—Pelham," Danby stammered, with a look of new and sharp distress, "that puts the old chap's death a lot closer to the time when we might have saved him! Suppose we hadn't gone to look at that damn tree—why, from that spot in the field where Mrs. Elderson left us—left us going the wrong way, three able-bodied men who would have made short work"—Danby sat forward in the chair—"from that spot, Pelham, a good runner could have made it in four minutes!"

I thought Pelham looked strange. He said, "A

good runner *did* make it. In three. We found the knife in her bureau drawer."

In the unnatural, stunned silence I heard myself say, "In *her*——?"

"With the pocketbook and the watch. She felt as safe as that."

I saw the horror and stupefaction of Danby's face.

"She sent us on a fool's errand, to look at that tree; and as soon as she was out of our sight she ran. She went in by the side door; she waked the old fellow up from his nap by the dining-room fire, where she had left him; she hustled him into the library and knifed him! The open window did the rest. Her chimneyful of little dry sticks was ready beforehand, she had seen to that! But she hadn't known that you would speak of her little dry sticks in my hearing. I tell you, she thought she was as safe as a church! She cut the time as fine as she dared before she shut the window and lighted the fire and slipped out by the side door again. Then all she had to do was to go in through the kitchen, making sure that the old negress noticed the clock. She had it all planned—and it clicked."

"But *why*? Why did she do it?" I cried. "Haven't you heard Danby talk about her devotion to that old man?" Danby's shocked face, even in the gloom, was white. These people had been his near neighbors for several years.

"I think," said Pelham's stern young voice, "that she just didn't want to be poor. She might

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have waited for him to die if she hadn't feared that by the time he was gone, the money would be gone too. You see, I haven't a doubt there's another man somewhere. Another man . . . a liaison, I'm sure of it. But no money! Doesn't it fit in? Wouldn't it account for her amiable willingness to carry on, as long as her precious personal future wasn't threatened? I guess she had all she wanted! But when she saw poverty ahead . . .” It was Pelham's turn to sit forward in his chair. For all his disclaiming the mood of an avenger of blood, it was like an avenger of blood that he spoke, “Think of it! Can't you picture it, can't you see it? Think of how she must have tested it out, over and over again, with that poor old devil asleep in his bed upstairs. So many minutes with a fire of little dry sticks, piled probably halfway up the chimney, to raise the temperature of that room . . . you remember it's a small one . . . so many degrees! As to the actual effect of the cold, and the open window, of course she had to guess. Just guess, and pick the coldest Sunday afternoon she could find, when the waitress and the man were out of the way. And it worked, it worked to a charm. It fooled the doctor, it fooled the police, it fooled everybody but Danby. Your name is going to be in the headlines to-morrow, Danby, as the champion sleuth of the ages! What do you think about that?”

“I think,” said Danby in a sudden firm loud voice, “that we all need a drink.” He rose from his dark corner, he got out the makings, he mixed us

three of the stiffest glasses it was ever my lot to drain. And by the time that I got mine down, I was to realize that I needed it indeed. But we did not drink for a moment yet, because Danby said, "I must get something," and stepped away from us into his little laboratory behind the living-room. As he came back, we heard his voice, "Get ready. We'll drink to a good night's sleep."

"That be hanged," said Pelham. "I'm a newspaper man. A good night's sleep is more than I shall get!"

But Danby said, "I'll sleep all right." For the first time I saw that he was holding a small brown bottle, he was dropping a liquid into a glass. From a dawning wonder at seeing Danby, of the iron nerves, feel the need of any drug, I was distracted by his voice. "You win, Pelham. You've made me prove your case against the scientific mind."

"What rot! It's all the other way," cried Pelham eagerly and anxiously, afraid he had offended Danby whom he liked so much, and whose voice all at once sounded so very queer.

"The case against the mind that never knows what it's doing till it's done . . . I guess I've proved *that*. I've brought suspicion down, landed it square . . ." He stopped.

"But she . . . But Mrs. Elderson . . ." I stammered, "she isn't . . . Is she . . ."

"My mistress," said Danby, and drank.

Of course he was stone dead before he struck the floor. My hardest job was making Pelham believe it.

MADAME THE CAT

By

Frederick Irving Anderson

AT BALETTE'S, in Twenty-second Street, Madame the Cat, who, from her regularity, had established herself as the sub-title of the establishment, lay curled in a sewing basket on the cigar counter, occupying the circle in so elegant a manner that no one could pass, apparently, without pausing to admire. Madame, the wife of the restaurateur, the new wife, was a creature of curves herself, and quite sleek and shining in spite of the occasional ravel in her glove-silk elbow, on which she eternally perched herself while regarding the scene; nevertheless, Madame the Cat collected most of the attention. Or so it seemed to the casual eye. So much too much, indeed, that

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now and again, bored with the "Ohs" and "Ahs" of rapture and the ceaseless stroking of gloved hands, she, the cat, rose, yawning and tail stretching, and departed in a none too complimentary manner; not to return again till the disturbance had abated. One saw then that what she nested on so elegantly in the basket were not eggs, nor yet blind kittens, but paper matches in little paper folders with somebody's advertisement printed thereon—wear So-and-So's hats, or eat Somebody's yeast cakes. No one ever called for these matches; no one would dream of incommoding Madame the Cat.

On Friday evening in mid-Lent, about a half hour before ten, when only the more intimate of the table-d'hôte custom still lingered over their *oignon* soup and *bouillabaisse*, Antoine, the Basque waiter, who pronounced Rostand without the *s* and wore a fandango whisker in front of each ear, bent over Oliver Armiston, an old habitué, where he sat alone poring over a chess book in the corner by the street window. He addressed Oliver as doctor. For twenty years this had been going on, and Oliver, pleased with the brevet and its anonymity, had never corrected it. Would *m'sieu le docteur* object to taking his *mazagran*—Antoine's rottable eyes reconnoitered the immediate neighborhood cautiously as he spoke in a low voice—to take his coffee in company with old Ferrand, opposite?

"You desire this table?"

Oliver was mildly surprised. This had never happened, in twenty years.

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Antoine bent lower. First he shot a look at the clock; then he regarded Oliver, held his look for a lingering moment.

"If you please," begged Antoine. His face brightened. "It would please old Ferrand."

Old Ferrand was a bookseller from the Avenue, who dined here with an almost voluptuous leisure every evening.

Oliver shook his head. He was waiting for someone. But he would have his *mazagran* at the table next to old Ferrand. He picked up his napkin and chess book, moved across the aisle and sat down, nodding to the ancient bibliophile.

It was the dozing hour, between those periods which were almost eras at Balette's. Dinner was going, supper was coming, with its new worlds to conquer. Tables were being softly caparisoned anew; waiters leaned against the wall in little clusters like sleeping cab horses. Antoine brought Oliver's coffee in a tall hot glass, and Oliver, dropping a square of sugar into it, lifted the sugar gently with his spoon and let it fall again. He was aware, without actually looking up, that the good-looking young policeman had come in from his post, as policemen will, and had paused at the desk; he had no eyes for Madame the Cat, so peacefully curled, this handsome young officer, but for madame, the black-silk chatelaine. But madame did not return his gaze; instead, her lowered eyes caressed the beautiful cat in the basket. The officer passed on back to the kitchen, as innocent as a lamb in a speak-easy; madame's eyes followed

him, a bemused smile on her well-done face. She bowed her head in her cupped palms for a moment, and suddenly recalling herself, resumed her adding and multiplying. Sullivan, the sculptor, with the great beard, wearing the tiniest of red ribbons in a buttonhole, made his way out, and she pumped up her full-toothed smile of adieu for him—a smile which vanished the instant the door closed. Now, in this room there remained, besides Oliver and old Ferrand, only a Hindu, some wandering swami in spotless turban and inky beard, to whom two fashionable young ladies listened devoutly—one wondered what he could find to eat here—and, in the far corner, as comedy relief, a pair from the Village, male and female, in low-heeled shoes and flowing collars; they had a wine cooler on the floor, and their heads were locked together in some courageous discussion of nude facts. Otherwise the tables here were waiting. From the next room voices occasionally floated in. Someone said quite audibly: "That is a world's record for yearlings." Oliver looked at his watch. It was getting toward ten. Antoine had refurnished that table in the window corner. Balette came moving down the room with the lightness of a captive balloon. His outlandish figure was beautifully tailored. He muttered to madame, and she, without looking up, merely curled her lip.

Balette came to rest before Antoine's table and studied it critically. Antoine stepped back, and Balette transferred his critical study to Antoine; and after some seconds of this close scrutiny, he

looked up at the lighting, he rejected one chair and Antoine fetched another. While he was doing this, the street door opened and all the waiters woke up, but immediately subsided. It was a young woman, rather overdone in manner and material. She paused meekly in front of Balette and he examined her from heel to helmet. With a nod he summoned his wife, and sharply and together they pulled the poor creature to pieces—she seemed to wither palpably under their unfriendly eyes. Madame then took the girl in back, where she evidently rearranged her in some manner which met with her husband's churlish assent, for the newcomer was brought back to the table and carefully seated. Balette instructed the girl painstakingly in the peculiar uses of the cutlery, of which there was an unusual and confusing variety. She studied the snail tongs with awe and suspicion.

The hour struck ten. Everybody started violently. The old *mâitre*, with a last hasty word to Antoine, trotted off. All eyes engaged the door. Nothing happened. After a time the tension relaxed and Antoine moved over to Oliver and bent low over the chess book; he said secretly:

"You would like the Camembert to-night, m'sieu."

"Who comes to the feast?" inquired the privileged Armiston.

Antoine lifted his heavy-lidded gaze, let it fall again.

"The senator," he said, in a still lower tone, put-

ting the accent under the *a*, where it was in the first place.

Oliver carefully avoided looking up.

"What senator?" he inquired of his chessmen.

Antoine swept the room, listening apprehensively with his eternal smuggler's forebodings. He shrugged, looked vacant. He bent down again.

"He is good frien'," he explained, offering this as some measure of extenuation. He propped himself against the wall, waiting. In a second or so, without moving his lips, he muttered:

"He is a wet."

That elliptical utterance really was complete. It explained everything. A wet senator. No wonder they were so particular about cutlery, napery, cookery, and so forth. A wet senator might be able to do something, anything—or at least so it would be hoped—in this age of neo-prohibitionism. Something amiss at the table took Antoine over there, and he came back with a thought worth while.

"'Eek!" he said, bending to Oliver's ear. He spoke it as a name. "'Eek! You onnerstan'. I do not. They call him 'eek!"

"Senator 'Eek?"

Antoine shook his head. No. He was puzzled himself.

"Non," he said. "It is 'eek senator, I think."

'Eek? Oliver quite shamelessly pondered the piquant mystery. Not Senator 'Eek. 'Eek senator! He was in the act of discovering check by taking a pawn *en passant*, when he suddenly paused. Hick!

A hick senator! A statesman from the tall timber was coming to town on— He paused abruptly, staring as if some actual material thing hung suspended in the air before his eye. It wasn't a thing; it was a thought. Just then the street door opened. Camera. Action.

Another false alarm. A slender, handsome young man came in—such a one as any ambitious hostess would gladly subsidize as a table decoration. But he was not of that sort. It was Morel, prize possession of the police deputy, Parr. He was a police detective, but no one was supposed to know it. Oliver saluted, and Morel advanced, smiling, drawing off a glove. So obviously some personage was he that several waiters and a bus boy or two clustered about him to take his things. Morel briskly chafed his hands as if he were about to play the piano, and shivered slightly to improve the fit of his coat, which was already perfect. Madame the Chatelaine was not wholly unconscious of his presence.

Morel and Christophe—a tall waiter to whom this table really belonged—put their heads together over the carte to so good a purpose that they were instantly in full accord, and Christophe hurried off, smiling. Morel moved over to the counter, before which he paused and bowed gravely to Madame the Chatelaine and felicitously to Madame the Cat; he pointed out his special brand of cigarettes and watched her long black-silk arm glide down like a snake for the box. He accepted it with a gesture of apology and went

back to his table, breaking it open. He pushed his coattails out of the way and slid along the leather divan to Oliver Armiston's side.

"Two on the aisle!" he remarked softly, his eye measuring the scene. "You couldn't have done better if we had sent you a diagram."

"What is the diagram?" asked Oliver.

"You are not to be told, sir."

This was not like Parr.

"His idea," Morel hastened to explain, "is that you, in your benighted ignorance, will detect trifles which I, in my highly sensitized informed state, will overlook."

That afternoon Parr, the deputy, had telephoned Oliver by private wire, saying:

"This is your *bouillabaisse* night."

It was. There was only one place in town, and only one night in the week, and that for a limited season. During Lent he attended here Fridays with a pious regularity.

"Could you stall till about ten o'clock in your usual corner?" asked Parr.

"And then what?" demanded Oliver.

"Morel will join you," explained Parr. "Sit through supper with him, like a good fellow."

"Let me tell you something! You are not going to pull any rough stuff up there. I am fond of Madame the Cat, and I will not have her annoyed."

"You wouldn't catch the act unless you watched closely," replied Parr with a laugh, and hung up.

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Oliver said to Morel, "The senator is delayed."

Morel lifted his supercilious gaze. "What senator?" he asked crisply.

Oliver smiled.

"Maybe you can name him before he arrives," said Morel.

"I can do that too," said Oliver. He bent toward the young dandy and whispered. "'Eek!" he said in Morel's ear. Morel looked startled, annoyed. "'Eek, yes!" insisted Oliver. "Hick!" he whispered hoarsely. "Use your sense of concordance, my dear fellow. Must I specify further? The hick senator from the pine barrens—the notorious——"

"Hush!" breathed Morel through his teeth. He showed his annoyance. He hated to be told things that only he knew.

"I can give you his menu, if you wish," continued Oliver. "Show me a man's cutlery, and I will tell you what hobbies his indigestion rides. First, caviar! The Romanoff pearls will be spread, by the swine, like butter, on a stalk of celery. Then oysters, *bourguignonne*, followed by green-turtle soup à la Birch. And then, believe it or not, snails. Honestly, could you imagine that child of a cranberry bog ever lifting himself so high by his own boot straps? I am curious to see how she wrangles them. She still thinks the tongs to be a nutcracker of some exotic type. For the joint, we have chosen a hen pheasant. Wait until you see Antoine carve the merrythought with a single snip

of his snickersnee! His Excellency, who has become a connoisseur since he got up in the world, will probably reserve the delicate wing tips for himself. He should share the merrythought with the lady, though, don't you think? My dear fellow," quoth Oliver with mock tragedy, "I have seen a lover turn pale at the plucking of a merrythought!" He pinned Morel with a look. "Isn't there something you wish to tell me before he comes? What detains him?"

"Ice in the river," said Morel languidly. "He is coming over by the ferry, instead of the tube, to avoid the more populous centers. Do you know he can count a murder on every finger—with a few odd jobs for his toes? No wonder he craves a simple evening now and then! Ha! He comes! I think you might do some chess. He will look us over before he turns down his collar."

Morel, more used to this business of tailing his man, had no difficulty with his face. Oliver, on the other hand, felt a faster pulse and the need to concentrate on his new chess arrangement. A chunky man passed slowly down the aisle, sweeping the room. He was almost entirely enveloped in a chin-chilla ulster; on the rim of the tall, upturned collar sat a broad-brimmed hat, like the lid of a kettle. There was the collar opening in front like a visor; otherwise the gentleman was completely incased. He looked over old Ferrand casually, over Oliver and Morel with a little more circumspection. The ulstered figure passed on, a flock of waiters by now in attendance—there was no doubt in their

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mind who it was. He laid his bristling gaze on the placid swami and his two beautiful companions, on the Village pair who were still locked cheek to cheek in their vital, undraped discussion of laboratory problems. Without warning he revolved like a gun turret on Oliver and Morel. Oliver was wrinkling his brow over Capablanca's variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined, and Morel was attacking a pickled herring resolutely. There could be no doubt about the earnestness of either of them; they were verisimilitude itself. Senator Brannil walked to the arched doorway of the inner room where sat the hoi polloi.

"I thought he always traveled with a body-guard," ventured Oliver.

"He does," replied Morel, in so light a voice that Oliver felt his hair bristling.

The senator was a hundred miles from home, and remote from the metropolitan area of the city, yet he canvassed every table. Now he slowly retraced his steps, unbuttoning his vast outer garment. He paused in front of the desk, where Madame the Chatelaine had pretended not to know him. As he turned down his high collar and revealed his statesman's visage, she exclaimed, *sotto voce*, in pleased surprise, and held him at arm's length across the counter for a palpitating instant. Her 'usban'! She would summon her 'usban'! *Quel bonheur?* He held up a protesting, a domineering hand. The king was incognito; he wished to remain so. While he was getting out of his sleeves, with Antoine's help, he noticed Madame the Cat.

He withdrew slightly. Oliver made the mental note: "He does not love cats."

The great man gave ear to Antoine, who whispered enticingly of the feast to come. There is a point, says Charlie Chaplin, where mere words fail and pantomime must take up the burden; Antoine passed that point in a burst of gustatory ecstasy. At a slow pace the pair proceeded to the table. She made to rise, but he thrust her back with a gesture. She was terrified. "It is hard," mused Oliver—taking a leaf from somebody's book—"being a woman!" Senator Brannil sat down and, after a stage pause, aired some casual talk as if renewing a conversation momentarily interrupted.

It was the hick senator of popular legend, beyond a doubt. He had the get-up of a country bridegroom. He played up to the part, made a career of it. He had all the histrionic ability of a great trial lawyer, but Fate had laid the Eighteenth Amendment in his lap in his prime and made him a brigand instead. Behind his buffoonery in the halls of the state capitol, with his cross-roads haircut and pomade and congress gaiters, he lived the hair-trigger life of a rum czar, and no henchman dared say him nay. He had organization, guns, ships, judges; he was invulnerable on his own bogs and beaches.

"If I hadn't been brought up from boyhood on comic opera," said Oliver, "there would be some things in life I simply could not make any effort to believe."

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There was something yet to be explained. Why should this fellow come straying way off here?

Morel said whimsically, "He can count a murder on every finger, with a few odd jobs for the toes, but occasionally he craves the simple life."

Oliver asked, in a low voice: "Are you going to take him?"

"You say that," replied Morel, with his passing smile, "as if that ceremony were some light and airy nothing, with no string tied to it. Am I going to take him?" repeated Morel. "What for?" he demanded.

"Is there any crime on the calendar he isn't guilty of?" protested Armiston.

"No," said Morel. "You know it. I know it. But where is the proof? Don't you know that the one unpardonable sin a cop can commit is to make a pinch that he can't make stick?" He added: "He has never been caught with the goods on. There is no arrest against his name. Can you assault the honor of his citizenship——"

"By hanging a murder on every finger, with a few odd jobs for the toes?" put in Oliver satirically.

Morel shrugged. The word didn't stampede him.

"Murder, yes," he said. "All of them by proxy. And even so, it is his own vermin he exterminates. He deserves a citation!" He had a smile over the idea. "It isn't murder that the chief is steamed up over. It is the way the Hick slams the poor cop or Federal agent who happens to annoy any of his

lieutenants in carrying out his orders. He is a great lawyer. He doesn't practice law, he practices rules of evidence! Pick up one of his men, and what happens? He is there in court with the bells on. There is always a misplaced comma, or lack of jurisdiction, or violation of sacred constitutional rights. All these things are much more heinous than the crime itself. And he is always right. Any judge in the land would uphold him. There is a law-school axiom that it is better to turn ten cut-throats free than to annoy one rule of procedure." Morel smiled dryly over the apocryphal rendition of an ancient platitude. "You'd think he would be satisfied," he continued. "Not at all. He follows up the poor devil that made the pinch, and that young fellow is out of luck from then on. It has come to be the custom," said the young dandy, bowing to nobody in particular, "not to interfere with the Hick's affairs. That's why I have been told off to sit up with a sick friend to-night," he added airily. He eyed Christophe, who approached. Christophe bore his supper, *sous cloche*. Christophe lifted one corner of the silver shell to permit a single excruciating wisp of fragrance to escape.

Morel solemnly approved the masterpiece, and the waiter retired to his serving table to dish up the feast.

"It is the privilege of the condemned man," confided Morel to Oliver, "to have anything he wants for his last meal." He was watching, with fascination, the sleight of hand of the ardent

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Christophe. "Tell me," he begged coaxingly, "how did you happen to know that the Hick was expected here to-night?"

"Tell me," bargained Oliver, "the while you are engrossed in your last meal before the end, what am I, as the unofficial observer, to look for?"

Morel considered before answering. He even ate a little. Finally he said, "We are passing him some marked money. We've got to find it on him!" He added, with a chuckle: "It is our own money, and we are rather particular about it."

Oliver kept his end of the bargain. "His waiter told me they were expecting him," he said. "The waiter is an old friend of mine."

Oliver had other and even more intimate friends, among the help in the establishment this evening, although he didn't suspect it until a bus boy came up to refill the ice bowl. It was the usual drab figure of an apprentice in some waiter's cast-off regalia. But this one was even more drab than usual. Something vaguely familiar in the droop of the head, as he slouched off, caught Armiston's eye. It was Pelts—little Pelts—Parr's other prize possession—Pelts, the shabby side partner of the elegant Morel. Oliver might have known he would be in the offing; one way or another, little Pelts would be in the picture, with the unobtrusiveness of a fly speck.

II

It is a fact. One must have been brought up on a diet of comic-opera situations to be able to swal-

low, without straining, some of the gospel truth dished up for us as everyday headlines. From the beginning of time there has been a preposterous aspect to the trade of smuggling, whether of black slaves, yellow aliens, diamonds in bulk, or uncut Scotch.

It was a little after eleven when Angellino Pompinelli finally arrived—Angellino, the little angel. It was high time. Morel had begun to fidget. The hockey game would be over shortly, and crowds from the Garden would come swarming in; then nothing could be done, for people would be crossing and recrossing the line of fire.

The senator had reached the merrythought. He had withdrawn it with fastidious care, hung it over the rim of an empty tumbler to cure, so they could pluck it—and read Fate—over the dessert. Pompinelli was a fine big fellow, with the plump, rosy cheeks of a rustic maiden, a soft, ox-eyed gaze of disarming naïveté, flashing white teeth and black curls, and mustaches heavily brilliantined. One could see at a glance that he was a simple fellow, without guile, although he did look worried. He stood, gazing about, as if fearful of what he might find. The waiters studiously avoided him, as they will avoid less-favored patrons just before a rush hour. He was helping himself to a little side table—one of Christophe's. Christophe intercepted him in the act of sitting down. The table was ear-marked. All these tables in this room were ear-marked. He could go to the other room. The food was the same, the same air,

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the same street number, everything was identical; only, he could not stay here.

Pompinelli was turning away irresolutely, when from the window corner—where he had not looked on entering, because of its discreetly shielded position—there came a cry of recognition.

The senator sprang to his feet, called his name, "Pompinelli, Pompinelli," and spread out his hands in an almost Latin gesture of ardent welcome.

Pompinelli turned as if shot, and so great was his emotion on beholding who it was, and the joyousness with which he was summoned, that tears of happiness seemed suddenly to well up in his lustrous dark eyes. He advanced to the senator, took the two outstretched hands in his own; and for a moment they stood clasped thus, each in his own racial manner giving the simple gesture the aspect and meaning of an embrace. The senator spoke in an inaudible tone, retaining his dignity, yet touching his words with a whimsical smile. Angellino considered his reply. He pumped the senator's two hands. He brushed away tears. He spoke with a rushing, laughing emotion, like a happy child. It was, to a casual eye, the chance meeting of two very dear friends. The senator, with a gesture of great courtesy, presented him to the lady, and Angellino Pompinelli bowed as if to the queen herself. He sat down in a proffered chair, still holding his hat, his coat open at the throat, his restless gaze furtively searching the empty spaces of the res-

taurant as if in quest of someone who had not yet come.

"Check!" muttered Oliver. "Contact!"

Morel nodded, as in agreement over some casual thing. There could be no doubt that something had passed between the senator and Pompinelli at the very instant of contact.

Morel arose and searched the pockets of his overcoat, hung against the wall behind him. He found what he sought—a cigarette lighter. He handed it to Oliver and resumed his supper. Oliver hadn't asked for it, but that was neither here nor there. It was a signal to someone that marked money had been passed and was at that instant in the senator's possession. Oliver took the lighter, helped himself to one of Morel's cigarettes, and lighted it. He resumed his contemplation of the Queen's Gambit Declined.

He found himself counting the ticks of the clock. These things always had a pace, a tempo, as if they had been carefully rehearsed to the beat of a metronome, like a radio program that costs so much a minute. After due time, doubtless on some predetermined beat, the shabby bus boy came down the room. He came empty-handed. He went directly to the senator and spoke to him. He said the senator was wanted on the telephone. The senator's eyes wandered shuttlecock-wise, from right to left. He looked over Pelts. He looked over Pompinelli. Pompinelli's blood was fast turning to water. This business of luring Fra Diavolo down the glen was not to his liking at all. Espe-

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cially when the woods were not alive with great, capable policemen, as he had been led to believe would be the case. His handsome, guileless countenance looked seasick. The senator looked up in surprise.

"Who is calling me?" he asked.

The bus boy did not know.

"Where is the telephone?"

In the office, the bus boy said.

The senator arose. He looked down on Angelino.

"I come back soon, my friend—my very, very good friend," he said. "We will pluck the merry-thought together, to see who lives the longer. Eh?" he cried with gusto.

He followed little Pelts down the aisle. Madame the Chatelaine interrupted his progress with her pumped-up smile, and he paused to pay his respects. He considered.

"You are so large and beautiful," he said, searching for some compliment worthy of her. "I think the men annoy you a good deal. Eh, madame?"

She shrugged her acknowledgment with an arched smile. Her 'usban', she said demurely, 'e go out—but 'e come back queek now soon! Her eyes caressed the cat. And the senator—though it was obvious he hated cats—brought himself to the point of stroking the beast, barely touching the creature—a gesture so unwelcome to the recipient that Madame the Cat arose stiffly and withdrew until she was sure he had departed. The senator

bent over Morel in passing, saying, "You are covered—both of you."

He went on. The door of the office closed on him. The restaurant resumed its nonchalant attitude, or appeared to do so.

"By whom?" demanded Oliver. Who could cover them, where they sat?

"The fellow with the curled-horse-hair beard," said Morel. The swami? Impossible! The swami was saying, in precise tones, while the two young things hung on his every syllable:

"The Sikhs are warlike people. They make a profession of arms, and derive great honor therefrom."

"That Village poet," said Oliver—"the one with the girl—I know him, don't I? Isn't that Terry, the kid cop from the Forty-seventh Street station Parr took such a fancy to?"

"The same," answered Morel, breaking his salad's back with his fork. Everything had been thought out in advance. He might be covered by the swami. The swami was covered by someone else, and so on *ad infinitum*. He waited. Inaction was difficult. Next to the ignominy of the arrest of the person of one so long sure of impunity, would be the atrocity of searching that person for contraband. That would be going on now, behind the closed door. The wagon would back up in the alley and take him away, riot guns and tear bombs at full cock.

"Your friend Pompinelli is slowly turning green," said Oliver, to whom the sense of ar-

rested action was becoming suffocating. Morel nodded. That was to be expected.

"He is a squealer," he explained. He was listening with furtive animal intensity. There might come a burst of machine-gun fire.

"If that door should open," he said to Oliver, assuming his light, lazy tone, "and the senator come walking out under his own power, my friend Pompinelli might get a day or two to put his personal affairs in order, and to make arrangement for certain prayers for the sins of the dead. Nothing we could do would save him." Morel made a futile gesture, looking oddly at Oliver. "I suppose you would call that murder, wouldn't you?" he asked. "To put Pompinelli where he is now? But he was a dead man when he came to us for help. Pompinelli hijacked a cargo the Hick let him have on trust—he thought he could get away with it. The Hick told him to stand and deliver—here! —to-night! Well, Pompinelli finally came crawling to us on his knees. He promised to deliver the Hick to us if we put up the cash."

He pushed away his salad and nodded to Christophe, who hovered near at hand. Christophe and the other waiters were oblivious of what was transpiring. It seemed impossible.

The door opened. Pelts came wandering out. Some people were coming in, and he hastened down to them to take their wraps, like any eager apprentice. Oliver thought the corners of Morel's mouth tightened. But if so, the effect was instantly erased. Morel studied Oliver's chess book.

"Queen check!" he said, with a chess-player's courtesy.

There was boisterous laughter. Balette, the maître, came out first; he turned, as he waddled, to give unctuous heed to Senator Brannil, who had him by one arm. Like all cosmopolites, the senator liked to be observed in intimate converse with the maître; it suggested he was a privileged habitué.

"How are the ladies, you fat old rascal?" he cried.

"Which one?" asked Balette naïvely.

"He! Ha-ha!" roared Brannil. "Which one? Isn't that just the answer for a Frenchman? Ha-ha-ha!"

Balette was worried. Something was transpiring under his very nose. He couldn't make it out. The senator was in good humor, though. That was a great relief. At first he had thought it was the senator who was being annoyed.

The early batch from the hockey game was arriving; some beautiful young girls hovered over Madame the Cat at the counter; one of them put a peachblow cheek against the silken ear of the elegant creature in the basket without the faintest protest from Madame the Cat. Balette took the senator all the way over to his table and seated him.

"Everything is all right, sir?" he asked shyly.

Everything was perfect. The senator dismissed Balette with a curt nod and put one arm about the slumped shoulder of Angellino Pompinelli. He had something to say, but first he must pause to

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watch the beautiful young ladies at the desk, fondling that cat! His eyes glowed. When his gaze came back, it encountered the wishbone of his partridge, hanging on the rim of the tumbler. He picked it up by one tong daintily, and offered the other to the deliquescent Pompinelli.

"Ha! The merrythought!" he said sonorously. "We will pluck it, you and I, eh? To see which lives the longer! Make your wish, my friend—my very, very good friend!"

Pompinelli stared at it in abject terror. His mouth fell open. His eyes were wild. He seemed on the point of screaming.

"Pull!" commanded the senator. "Pull!"

Dumbly the man took his end and pulled.

"Pull! Pull!" urged the merry statesman. It was impossible. It wasn't dry enough, it refused to break, to reveal Fate. If this were an augury, it did not help poor Angellino. He continued to watch the senator like a hypnotized bird.

The senator called for his bill and settled it handsomely. Antoine with hands up, palms out, exclaimed ecstatically, it was too much—too much! They put the senator into his coat, turned up his collar, set his broad-brimmed hat over the rim of the high collar like the lid of a tea kettle. Still Pompinelli did not move. Senator Brannil tapped him gently on the back.

"I won't see you again," he said. "Won't you shake hands with me?"

He held out a hand. But to take it required more courage than the doomed Pompinelli could now

summon, and he continued to sit like stone. The senator turned away. He was in fine humor. He bowed to Madame the Chatelaine, and she gave him a dazzling smile. He pressed his way through the cluster of beautiful girls admiring Madame the Cat. He said, in his sonorous voice, that always held attention:

"I wonder why she has not the abiding faith in me that she has in you!"

Timidly he essayed to touch her, to stroke her back. With an angry snarl the creature uncoiled herself, sprang up, and dug the poor offending hand with her claws. He snatched his raked hand away, and a merry laugh greeted this exhibition of hostility on the part of Madame the Cat.

"'Twas ever thus!" intoned the senator tragically. "From childhood's happy hour, I never loved the sweet wild flower but what it poisoned me!"

He held open the door for his drab companion, and, she preceding him, departed into the night.

So far as Morel was concerned, it was one of those terrible flops from which there was nothing to be salvaged. Unless, possibly for a brief season, Pompinelli. He said to the bus boy who was filling his drinking glass:

"Better take him quietly away and lock him up for the night."

The place was now filling to overflowing, and Christophe began to look with hungry eyes at Oliver's table, which had served its usefulness for Oliver and Morel. While they were putting on

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their things, Oliver was called to the telephone. It was Parr, the deputy.

"If you would like to know what I think of the pair of you," said Parr, "come over here."

They drove across town to the new precinct headquarters where Parr maintained a night point of attack. They were shown in to him at once. In a chair, handcuffed, sat the senator. And at a desk in one corner sat his drab little companion at table. She hadn't changed her costume in any particular, yet somehow there was nothing drab about her now. She was making out a report of some sort, and at the exclamations of astonishment that escaped Oliver and Morel, she glanced quickly up and back again to her work, with a fleeting smile.

Parr held in his hand, folded three times, a ten-thousand-dollar bill, one of the big fellows that the big bootleggers go in for, for small change. He laughed good-naturedly, and seeing their rising discomfiture, he laughed still more.

"You call yourself a detective!" he said to Morel. "And you—you go in for unofficial observing!" he said to Oliver.

"But you didn't find it on him!" protested Morel.

"She did!" said Parr. "She handcuffed him when he stepped into the car, so he wouldn't have a chance to shift it again. Then she brought him here, like a little lamb!"

"But he didn't have it on him!" protested Morel. "We went through him."

“Did you search Madame the Cat?” asked the deputy, roaring with delight.

That was it! The senator had slipped the bill under Madame the Cat, when he went in to be searched. And he picked it out when he departed. He had overlooked nothing—the hick senator—except only one thing—the young lady who came with the dinner.

ALIBI

By
William J. Neidig

BRUNER, squatted in front on his toes, glanced appraisingly at the taxicab ahead. He was not pursuing the taxi; he was merely following it. He weighed the distance between the two vehicles, and then, looking behind him, his distance from the nearest traffic in that direction.

"Steady, bo!" he cautioned his driver, his fingers on the handle of the side door.

A moment later he had edged through the door and found foothold on the running board.

"Cut!" he said.

The car leaped forward catlike; so quickly responsive, it had drawn up even with the taxicab be-

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fore its presence was suspected; so delicately handled, Bruner was able to step from one running board to the other. When the taxi driver at last saw him through the glass, he saw at the same time the shielded black muzzle of a pistol.

"Turn south!" Bruner commanded sharply.

His own car had already forged ahead to point the way. The taxi had no choice, but swerved into the dark side street behind it like a hare dropping back to follow the hound.

"Under the L against the curb!" snapped Bruner.

As the taxi came to a stop his own driver, free now, ran back to add his weight to the attack.

"Take this guy, bo, and watch him good while I chin with the janes." Flinging open the door, he added: "And now, ladies, your diamonds, if you please!"

He collected his toll swiftly but intelligently, naming each item as he thrust it into his pocket. When he was through he lifted the hood of the taxi, stripped off such wires as he could reach, warned his victims to remain motionless, and stood guard while his driver backed up for him. Then, slipping into his place, he again felt the black car leap forward.

"That was the easy part," Bruner said. "The rest is brains."

Life is as we live it. Sometimes it resembles nothing so much as a twisted red thread thrown down at random upon a maze of spilled roads. If

it falls so and so, men say of us that we have intelligence or lack it; or wealth or lack it; or even that the red thread could not have fallen otherwise, mankind being what it is.

Donovan, for example. The twisted red thread of his life, thrown down at random, had fallen across the Union Station. At the time of Bruner's raid on the taxicab he was standing before a ticket window, asking for a lower berth to Fort Wayne.

"Nothing left but uppers," the Pullman agent said.

"An upper to Fort Wayne," Donovan amended. His train did not leave until midnight, but he sought out his car to see if he could get some sleep before then.

"What's happening in Fort Wayne that all the lowers are taken?" he asked the porter when he saw what he had drawn.

"It's Chicago where what's happening is happening. To-night is Indiana night at the grand opera. All the tuxes in the Maumee portage are out with their ladies, and I don't mean maybe. We're running three cars to-night."

"Good idea. Who's behind the thing?"

"Mrs. Hyers is the lady," replied the porter.

"Mrs. Burley Hyers?"

"That's the lady. She's a millionaire. They say she owns a necklace a prince used to own in Europe."

"I've heard of her," said Donovan as a surface car rumbled across a viaduct overhead, filling the night with noises.

He had not only heard of her but knew her; for Redelos Indemnity, for which he acted as jewel expert, had insured her diamonds. The necklace spoken of by the porter was doubtless the one said to have gone to Brazil with Carlota of Bourbon on her flight from Portugal. The necklace was priceless, but Mrs. Hyers could have afforded a finer, for her husband controlled a vast system of power lines in the Middle West.

"What's that noise?" he continued.

"Van Buren Street viaduct, over our front end."

"How long do you have to keep those aisle lights going? They blaze down on my pillow."

"My passengers ain't come yet, suh."

"I'll stump around for a while outside," said Donovan. "Nobody can sleep in that upper berth at this hour."

Digging into his pocket, he found his pipe, then tobacco and matches. He strolled up the platform at the head of a line of blue smoke, and then out through the gate into the station concourse, tired and restless, but with his mind at peace.

And then suddenly the red thread of his life, untwisting half a kink, fell across another spilled road, and the blue smoke began ascending faster.

The man had black hair and penetrating, watchful eyes, and across his chin lay a welted scar. Donovan recognized him as a former gangster from the West Side. Taking his time, he sought out the train conductor, who was an acquaintance. He managed to approach as the black-haired man was leaving.

"This makes five, six, seven times I've told that black hombre something," grumbled the conductor, "and he doesn't know as much as I do right now. He's as full of fool questions as a brood comb is of bees. That hombre was waiting with a question when we opened the train."

Donovan, affecting indifference, asked diplomatically, in case he should be overheard: "Who is he?"

"Lower 7 in Car 21, Pittsburgh ticket."

"Lower 7, and doesn't use it, and I have upper 3, and can't. He must have bought early."

The man of the welted scar moved on. Donovan watched him out of the corner of his eye until he disappeared down the train shed, then he asked softly:

"Did you notice anything odd about that man, Garrick?"

"What would I notice? The scar on his chin? I'll know him again, if that's what you mean."

"As conductor of this train, you ought to be told. That man has a pistol in his pocket."

"Thanks," said Garrick, after a moment.

"I know him of old. He's a crook named Barker, or Baker, or sometimes Boker. Ever hear of the Barker gang? You were talking to its brains. The last I heard of him he was living at Joliet. He must have come up for parole."

"A convict?"

"Formerly. He may not be one now. The Barker I knew was a bad egg—very bad. Ever hear of

a crook known as the Alibi? No? We called him that because of his elaborate foresight. He must have reformed, or he wouldn't be dropping Chicago for Pittsburgh. Either that, or——"

"Either that or what?" asked Garrick.

Donovan recharged his pipe, lighted it, pulled it into glowing life before he answered. His lean face was devoid of expression.

"Either that, or he's on this train for a reason," he replied at last.

"Up to some deviltry, do you think?"

"No deviltry connected with you. That wouldn't be his style. The man does possess brains, Garrick. At the same time, you can't overlook his having that pistol. What would an honest man want of a pistol in Pittsburgh? He may be up to something outside."

"I'll keep my eye on him," said Garrick.

"Not necessary."

Donovan strolled back into the train shed. As he passed Car 21 he noticed that Barker was standing beside the steps. He heard himself addressed:

"Mister! The conductor says you want a lower berth. Did I get him right?"

The smile with which the question was received did not appear in Donovan's eyes. He replied gravely that he wished a lower berth in order to go to bed.

"I got one I will trade."

"Fine! Where are you?"

"This car, right here."

"I'm in 43."

"Where is that car, mister?"

"The third car forward," said Donovan.

The head of the Barker gang seemed displeased, although why he should be did not appear. Donovan caught a look of quick inquiry in the bright eyes before their owner withdrew them.

"Too much street cars. I better stay in my lower. What time is it, mister?"

Donovan replied, giving the hour.

"Not so good. You look like a Gray Sox catcher name of Spot Sullivan. Got a baseball? We can see."

"Not with me."

"I make me something," said Barker.

"Now, why did that crook say all that?" Donovan asked himself as he moved away.

Upon reaching his car he glanced idly back. Either Barker had found a something, or had swiftly made one; he stood tossing into the air what looked like a child's bean bag. So crudely was it fashioned, the man at times was obliged to catch it by its protruding red cloth ears.

"Why?" he repeated. "Why is this Barker gangster suddenly so anxious to be seen? Why all the questions he asked Garrick? Why did he stop me? He doesn't know who I am. Why so particular about the time? And why this childishness of the bean bag? He must have an object. I'm becoming interested."

But later he decided otherwise. He had troubles enough of his own, without hunting out new ones.

When he had smoked out his pipe he did remark to his porter:

"I suppose these opera ladies will be wearing their finest jewels."

"Yassuh. All the gimcracks they can hang on."

"Aren't you afraid of a holdup?"

The porter showed every sound tooth in his head.

"Ever see a Pullman holdup, boss? Them bandits wouldn't find enough hardly to buy themselves a breakfast—just some dollar bills for the porter, if he's lucky, and some screenings you can't count hardly. Just stickpins and nickels and a brass watch or two. The big gimcracks would all slide down behind where nobody can get at them, or anyhow, not in a hurry. I swept up one night after a bandit. Me, I made more in tips out of that holdup than the bandit made himself."

"I'll remember what to do," said Donovan, dismissing the subject of Barker from his mind. "And now, if you'll get me my ladder, I'll try again for some sleep."

The light shone into his lean face, but he threw his arm across his eyes and did not see it. The noises of Van Buren Street struck downward now and then, trickling along the metal roof like sounds through beaten tin. For a while he heard these noises; then he dozed off into slumber.

Donovan was awakened indefinitely later by what might have been a crash in the street overhead, except that it seemed nearer. Yet he did not

remember it as loud. In part it may have been dreamed. Or it may have had some other origin.

Whatever its cause, it awakened him sharply, and he lay listening for further noises, like a housewife roused by burglars. So sharp was the impression left by the sound, he lay back motionless, expecting that what had startled him awake would somehow be heard further.

But although he lay listening for it, no sound recurred that even remotely resembled that other. Noises there were from the street—the occasional dull rumble of a truck, the grinding roll of west-bound surface cars, and once the shrieking of a siren as a police ambulance dashed past. None of these was the sound that had awakened him.

He lay back so, the doors of his hearing thrown wide, until he noticed through his other senses that the train was not in motion; whereupon he saw that he could not have slept as long as he had imagined. He inferred from the foreground silence that the opera party had not yet arrived.

Later still, but not so much later as it seemed, he heard a burst of voices outside and the sound of people swarming up the steps and down the aisle, all talking excitedly among themselves without thinking to speak softly.

A woman in the aisle at his elbow was talking to a companion. Except for the curtain, she might have been talking into his ear. He could not help overhearing her.

“My dear, it was dreadful! She lost everything she had!”

"Robbed in the open street?"

"Two bandits! They spied on her at the opera and followed her out. She lost that diamond necklace, and her rings, and those platinum bracelets; and the brooch she bought in Italy, and her diamond tiara."

"Her husband too?"

"He couldn't come. Mrs. Ames was with her. She lost her jewels, too, but some of them were paste."

"How did it ever happen?"

"A black car crowded them against the curb. Their driver tried to read the license plate, but the bandits had daubed it with grease."

The voices passed on, to be joined by others and succeeded by others. After a little the train began moving. Donovan, who had not undressed, slipped into his coat and shoes and rang for the porter.

"No use. I can't sleep. No one else is trying to. I think I'll camp with my pipe in the smoking room."

"We had a robbery," said the porter.

"So I gathered."

"Diamonds," said the porter.

"It's always diamonds, isn't it? Why will women carry around diamonds at night, openly, without the slightest protection?" And such was his state of mind, Donovan did not so much as inquire who had been robbed. It was the porter who ventured the important information.

"Yassuh. Mrs. Burley Hyers had her necklace stole."

This story begins with a piratical raid upon a treasure-lined taxicab. It now returns to that raid.

"The rest is brains," Bruner had said.

When he had thrown his pistol into a dark entrance, to be recovered later, and had exchanged his gray hat for a green, and had turned a few corners to confuse pursuit, he swung into a line of traffic to seek the greater safety of the West Side. Later he left the thoroughfare for a dark side street. Here he stopped to wipe off his license plate, finishing the job with his red bandanna handkerchief.

He did not reënter the car. Instead, he lifted out from behind his seat a package done up in brown paper. Again he made a swift, but careful reconnaissance.

"All jake, just like we said. You duck two, three more corners and you can run in the bus. Me, I slap-foot it from here on my dogs."

With that the car disappeared into the night. Bruner had become for the first time in his life a professional pedestrian. With his bundle under his arm and his pockets stuffed with diamonds, he set out down the street like a belated clerk; harmless, unregarded, able to look any man in the eye.

But after all there is a difference. He believed he looked like a clerk, but in his heart he knew he was not. He could not quite feel at home on the sidewalk, could not quiet enter his part. An honest clerk would have stalked boldly down the street.

He would not have felt conspicuous. Bruner was not actor enough to forget his diamonds. Or perhaps he was not actor enough to forget the absence beneath him of wheels.

Thus, when a watchman stepped out from a shadow in the next block, Bruner saw him instantly. A clerk would have disregarded his presence. Bruner dodged into the shelter of a door like a petty thief, emerging when the watchman passed on, like the moon from behind a cloud. Or perhaps it was his pistol he missed.

The district consisted of dark streets crossed here and there by east-and-west through-traffic lanes. One of these thoroughfares he now approached. Bruner on wheels, armed with a pistol, would have raced it from end to end. Bruner, the unarmed clerk, had to force himself to set foot upon its sidewalks.

Intelligence is the only master, of course. The knowledge of the wealth in his pocket may have caused his heart to pound. His sense of handicap may have disturbed him. The sound of a police siren may have added to his nervousness. But his intelligence kept him from scurrying for a hole like a rat.

Thrusting out his chin, he set his thin soles firmly upon the hard pavement and started eastward down the block. He knew what he had to do. Dodging into doorways would not help him. He kept on boldly, past windows filled with second-hand motors, drills, sewing machines. After a while he reached the filling station at the corner.

And then, upon the farther corner, stepping out into the light where no mistake was possible, he saw Policeman Pat Gonzales, an acquaintance of other days, twiddling with his free right hand at the butt of his holster pistol.

A glimpse of a harmless night watchman had sent him into a doorway. The presence ahead of a real danger made him forget that he was on foot and helpless.

As he had feared might happen, the policeman stopped him.

"Hello, Bruner, What's the magnet?"

Bruner could feel the diamonds dragging at his pocket. A strange inclination seized him to support the load surreptitiously, using his left hand. But he fought it down. Instead, he grasped his paper parcel more tightly.

Then suddenly all nervousness left him and he faced the officer with a grin.

"Magnet?" he asked. "Oh, that! You mean pull. I got a magnet with the mayor. He's waiting for me in his office."

"It wouldn't surprise me a bit," said Gonzales.

"He wants me to fetch you along sometime," Bruner ventured, with humorous impudence. "He said he couldn't ask you himself, because nobody never knew where they could find you. So he asked me. So I told him you was here."

"I might surprise you by going," the policeman replied to that.

"Not me, you wouldn't surprise."

"I guess that's right too. We've been there before. Where you going with that package?"

"Home," said Bruner.

"And that's where? I forgot to take your home address last time I saw you. All I had was your business. Joliet, wasn't it?"

"Two years," said Bruner, "but I checked out. I live now at the Gaylord Hotel."

"Yes?"

"You can phone and see, with a nickel."

"What you doing over here on the West Side if you live at the Gaylord?" persisted the policeman.

"Me? Exercise. I been reducing."

"Reducing who?"

"I just stuck up a bank," said Bruner.

"It wouldn't surprise me a bit."

Again the policeman eyed the package clamped under Bruner's right elbow.

"Kale," said Bruner, replying to the question before it was asked.

"Kale your aunt! What's in there, Bruner? What is this package you're dragging home this late at night?"

"Just supplies," replied the other, with intelligent unwillingness.

"What supplies?"

"Stuff to eat for breakfast."

"Stuff to eat? Breakfast? All right. Suppose we have a look at this breakfast stuff."

Bruner out of sheer hardihood affected an increasing unwillingness to open his package; whereupon the policeman became increasingly insistent.

In the end Gonzales had his way. The package, upon being opened, proved to contain a pasteboard box of breakfast cereal, a half pint of cream and a quarter-pound column of creamery butter inclosed in a colored carton.

"Not that I doubted your word, Bruner, but I was curious to see. Wrap up your breakfast. You're blocking the sidewalk."

The danger of a further search seemed past, but as Bruner rewrapped his merchandise, again the sound was heard—this time from the south—of a police siren. He inferred that the news of the robbery had been broadcast and that police cars throughout the city were seeking the bandits.

"You got my address, Pat," he said with a grin, tucking his package under his arm.

"Sure! I know now where to find you up to breakfast time, but you better go straight home before you spill your cream."

"Watch me!" Bruner replied.

The questioning of the policeman, and perhaps the renewed sound of the siren, resulted in tightening Bruner's courage to a point where it sang. He had been a little impudent in his replies. He now, in his actions, became both impudent and audacious. The street here, like its east-and-west companion thoroughfares, crossed a railroad yard at an elevation, and then was carried by a bascule bridge over the river. Instead of going straight home, Bruner walked out upon the viaduct and stopped.

Possibly his sharp eyes had caught a glimpse of

Policeman Brown ahead, approaching over the bridge.

Whatever his reasons, he now performed an act of studied insolence. Spreading his oil-smeared red bandanna handkerchief upon the sidewalk, with Policeman Gonzales watching him on one side and Policeman Brown on the other, he began drawing from his left coat pocket the loot of the evening. He laid out upon the handkerchief a diamond tiara, a diamond necklace, three platinum bracelets set with diamonds, a diamond brooch, and a handful of smaller pieces such as rings and pendants. He did this openly, with no attempt at concealment, taking his time and searching his pocket carefully to make sure that nothing was overlooked. Then, tying the corners of the handkerchief together in a tight knot, he prepared to move on.

Possibly he had not until this moment seen the approach of Policeman Brown from the bridge.

Policeman Gonzales had already burned his fingers upon one of Bruner's parcels. He stood watching his actions, but did not walk toward him. His presence merely blocked any flight to the west. But Policeman Brown was actively interested. He plainly meant to understand what Bruner had been doing.

Bruner glanced behind him at Gonzales, then ahead at the officer bearing down on him from the east. Beyond the policeman lay the bridge over the river. Beyond the bridge lay the dark cross street into which he had forced the taxicab. Since then he

had become a pedestrian, but his route to his room would take him past the nearest corner.

He glanced at Policeman Brown, then at the incriminating parcel in his hand; then, making a dash for the stone railing at the edge of the sidewalk—here the height of his eyes—he began climbing it as fast as he could.

“Halt, you!” commanded Brown, dashing forward.

He arrived in time to clutch at Bruner and prevent his escape over the railing. Bruner’s intelligence entered; for even if he had cleared the railing, he could not have dropped to the tracks below, which were roofed over. Upon feeling the officer’s hand upon him, he slipped back to the sidewalk.

“Now, that was a fool thing to do,” sputtered the policeman. “What was it you were tying up in that rag?”

“Just some pieces of glass,” replied Bruner, whose pockets were now empty, shrugging his shoulders. “Just a package.”

“Let me see,” said the other, as Policeman Gonzales approached.

“Can’t. I haven’t got it.”

“What?”

“You made me drop it,” said Bruner.

“Watch this man, will you, Pat, while I look. He says he dropped something over the rail.”

Gonzales replied that probably he spoke the truth. “He told me that other package was his breakfast, and it was.”

But Policeman Brown, who had heard of the Hyers robbery, had seen too much of Bruner with his own eyes to be swayed from his suspicions.

"I want to look," he said. Climbing to the rail, he leaned over. "He dropped it, all right. It's lying on the ledge down there, and I'm going after it."

"Well?" asked Policeman Gonzales, when the handkerchief again lay spread out upon the sidewalk.

"Well?" demanded Policeman Brown.

"Glass," replied Bruner calmly.

"Maybe, maybe not," said Brown. "We'll have a wagon and look it over with the owners."

"That will be better," Gonzales agreed; "unless somebody here has a diamond to test this glass with."

"I got one in my ring," Bruner told him. "Want it? Here's my diamond, and here's my sales slip from Benson's." His lip curled into a sneer. "Scratch one. Scratch it anywhere. They only cost a quarter for the lot."

"It scratches," said Gonzales. "It's glass."

"What do you know about that?" Policeman Brown demanded of the universe.

But Policeman Gonzales was not satisfied. "Why did you throw them away?" he asked.

And Policeman Brown wished to know: "Why did you wrap them first in a handkerchief?"

"Why didn't you throw them into the river?"

"Why did you keep that sales slip?"

"Why did you buy that junk, in the first place?"

ALIBI

But instead of answering these questions, and the others that preceded and followed them, Bruner, who had brains and was feeling the flush of their use, fell into a mocking mood and invited both to breakfast.

III

When O'Day's telegram overtook him, Donovan had been pulling at his pipe off and on for an hour and a quarter, and the car had not yet quieted down. The message read as follows:

HYERS DIAMONDS STOLEN AUTO BANDITS AFTER
OPERA. RUNNING-BOARD JOB. NO LINE. EX-
CONVICT BRUNER OLD BARKER GANG TWENTY
MINUTES LATER DROPPED HANDFUL PASTE TRIN-
KETS WRAPPED BANDANNA HANDKERCHIEF OVER
RAIL VAN BUREN VIADUCT FOR NO REASON. ON
FOOT. SALES SLIP FOR PASTE. FIREPROOF ALIBI. NO
CONNECTION HYERS. RETURN FIRST TRAIN. REPLY.

O'Day was Donovan's immediate chief in Redelos Indemnity. To send the message so soon, he must have been notified at once of the loss. The Bruner items could only have come from the police. A fireproof alibi! Barker gang!

"What's the next train back to Chicago?" he inquired of the porter who had brought him the message.

"Number 15, leaving Fort Wayne at 3:40."

"And when do we reach Fort Wayne?"

"About 3:10," replied the porter.

"Any earlier stops?"

"No more stops. Valparaiso was the last."

"Where is the train conductor?" Donovan asked then. "Forward?"

"First car behind, suh."

"I'll look him up," said Donovan.

But instead of seeking Garrick at once, he sat back for a while like a dead man, too preoccupied with his thoughts even to refill his pipe. After that he went to his berth for his bag, from which he slipped a pistol into his pocket.

Later he ran down Garrick and showed him his telegram.

"Barker?" the conductor grunted. "They can't drag Barker into it. That hombre gave me his ticket at 9:30 and stayed in sight until the train left."

"I wish to see for myself," said Donovan.

"Go ahead," said Garrick.

"I may need a little help from this railroad."

"Where does the railroad come in?"

"You're the railroad," said Donovan.

"Go on! Show me!"

"First I shall ask you to stop this train, and after that I shall ask you to start it again."

"Can't," said Garrick.

"I hold a good hand," said Donovan. "This badge I'm wearing isn't much, but it's something. The badge is one of my trumps. If you don't stop the train your railroad will be sued for damages. That's another. I have others still. Take my word

for it. When you get to Fort Wayne, ask your boss."

"What do you want me to do? Just stop the train?"

"Just that; unless by chance you can help me further. You don't happen to own such a thing as a colored handkerchief?"

"I have a red bandanna," said Garrick. "Why?"

"Barker's bean bag is made from one."

"I don't see the connection," said Garrick.

"You will. There's a bean bag lying on the roof of my car, almost over my berth. I heard it land in my sleep. I'm going up over the tender to fetch it down."

"Barker's bean bag?"

"Ask him."

"He must have made a mishrow," said Garrick, "to land it on the roof. But I still don't see what you want of my handkerchief."

"He may ask the porter to get it down for him. The porter will find yours bunched there in its place."

"Oh, what do you want of his? No matter; you say you want it. When? Now?"

"Now," said Donovan.

"Then come forward with me to the first car, and make it snappy. I'll fix it up for you ahead."

When Donovan climbed back into the train somewhat later, Garrick's red bandanna handkerchief was missing from his pocket. Instead a gaudier cloth lay there, of a different pattern, its figures stained with grease. But, on the other hand,

the gaudier cloth no longer lay bunched on the roof of the car, but Garrick's bandanna instead, knotted about a handful of selected black lump coal from the tender.

"This is what I brought back with me," said Donovan, loosening the cloth.

The vestibule door had been closed and the trap snapped down. The train was again in motion, gathering speed. The car ahead—a blind baggage—had neither platform nor entrance. Behind them down the train almost every passenger had retired for the night, with the exception of those in the opera party.

Garrick raised his lantern and looked.

"Put it away!" he said quickly. "Are you crazy? That man with the pistol is wandering around somewhere. He might stumble into us."

But Donovan shook his head.

"He's still working at his alibi. I think he will now begin getting hold of a porter. He'll have to; we'll soon be in Fort Wayne."

"And you?"

"I'm not changing my plans," said Donovan. "I have no evidence against him."

The Maumee is not a jewel, but a river in Ohio, and Napoleon not a dead man, but a town straddling that river. Donovan knew that the town was a county seat, for the sheriff of Henry County lived there. A thief had been captured on the Maumee bridge. The sheriff, knowing Donovan of old, had wired asking him to look over a pint

or two of diamonds found in the suspect's possession. Donovan was on his way to do so.

He had left his hat and coat in his berth. These he now obtained; and since he did not mean to return, he thrust what he had brought from the roof into his hand bag and took it with him also. Then he went to the smoking room, now empty, to wash up for morning.

Garrick, passing through the train, paused inquiringly. Donovan nodded toward the bag.

"Where's your porter?" the conductor asked.

"Visiting, I think. We're still alone."

"If that crook knew what you had, Donovan, you'd get a knife between the ribs."

"A dumdummy slug, more likely. But he doesn't."

"Be a little careful."

"Oh, I'm all right!"

"Yes? Look at yourself in the glass," said Garrick.

Donovan glanced at his reflection in the mirror.

"You caught me that time," he said. "Governor, what a sight! I have some cleaning up to do."

He knew that his hands needed washing, but not that his adventure had left him so completely begrimed. His collar had melted down into a soiled gray rag. His stained shirt sleeves no longer held fellowship with linen. His head and neck were smoke black. His hair, damp still from steam, held soot and cinders until its texture had become indistinguishable. And his lean Irish face! Steam and perspiration, soot and cinders, oil and grease, along

with grime from his sticky hands, had combined here and there with the richer smudge of boiler coal to give him the hue of a race from the tropics.

"I look like a coal heaver!"

The conductor passed on and Donovan began upon his task. Filling a wash bowl with hot water, he proceeded to plaster liquid soap upon his hair and neck and smudged face, and into his ears and his eyes.

He was engaged in bringing the whole into a lather when the curtains parted. Again someone had stopped to look into the room. He heard the movement, but he could not see the visitor because of the soap.

"That you, Garrick?"

The next he heard was the familiar voice of Barker.

"Say, mister!" he heard. "Who lives in this car? You?"

"This is my car, yes."

"They tell me she don't go through. Is that right?"

"Right. The car is set out at Fort Wayne. They place it on a siding, so as not to break the sleep of the passengers."

The man's bright eyes seemed perplexed.

"What made the train stop while ago?" he asked.

"We may have struck a block. The Cincinnati train runs just ahead. Or we may have stopped to let somebody off."

"You get gummed up like a boiler room on these fast trains," he said then.

"Soft coal," replied Donovan watchfully.

"How did you get it so bad up your arms?"

"That's because I had my coat off."

"What you washing up so soon for?"

"We'll soon be in Fort Wayne," said Donovan.

But Barker had asked the questions with a purpose. The reference to Fort Wayne reminded him of that purpose, and he passed on. A little later the porter told Donovan that Barker had accidentally let his bean bag fall on top of the car.

"Now I have to get it down for him with a ladder."

But Donovan changed the subject: "I leaned against something sooty, porter. See if you can brush me down a little. And, porter, I want a blank for a wire."

"Yassuh. Here you are."

"Where do I get the train for Napoleon, leaving at 4:15? Do I have far to go?"

"Just over the tracks. The two roads come in alongside each other. But they won't let you cross."

"This is the message. File it collect at Fort Wayne."

The telegram was addressed to O'Day, and merely stated that Donovan would go on to Napoleon. It ended with the request to arrest the man called Bruner for the theft of the Hyers diamonds.

Some have them and some have them not. The difference amounts to a vastness. Lazarus, who had them, but remained poor, was invited to make his abode in Abraham's bosom. Dives, who had them not, but grew rich, was invited to live beyond the fixed great gulf, among the gnashers of teeth.

Donovan had them. Instead of looking for a redcap who did not exist at 3:10 in the morning, he had Conductor Garrick pass him across the tracks to his connecting road. Instead of seating himself in the other station beside his bag, he found a thin dime and checked the thing in a patent locker. The act gave him freedom; he could now seek the inner light or he could seek the outer darkness.

He chose the darkness—an inklike cranny among a tangle of trucks beyond the building where he could breathe.

And the man Barker had them. Barker, untying a red bandanna handkerchief recovered by a porter, had found his diamonds turned into a pound and a half of soft coal; whereupon, possessing brains and a good memory for smudges, he placed his finger upon cause and upon effect, and set out to look for Donovan. The porter innocently helped him by speaking of Donovan's plans. The Pittsburgh train consequently had to leave short one passenger, and lower 7, Car 21, went unoccupied after all.

Brains!

Donovan was not expecting to see Barker again. He had, speaking figuratively, kissed him good-by. If he did see him again, however, he wished to see him first. This is what he did, in fact, do. And because he had acquired a little skill in such matters, he managed to continue watching the man without being seen himself.

"You and I may have to drive the rest of the way," he told his pipe. "The man knows too much. He knows where to look for his diamonds."

Or almost. He knew within fifty feet. Donovan watched his dogged search with alert amusement. When the head of the Barker gang thrust his right hand into his pocket, he thrust his own long fingers down into his own right-hand pocket to cool them against the steel of his own pistol.

And then suddenly Donovan stiffened, so tensely his tendons might have rung like steel wires; so sharply, he stopped midway of a draft at his pipe, leaving the stem full of smoke. Nothing had happened. Barker still wove about, in and out, between the waiting room and the platform. And yet a good deal had happened. A new idea had happened.

"Of course!" he all but cried aloud.

After a little he began framing the new idea into words. Later still, the words overflowed their sentences and he looked about him for an exit. Waiting until Barker again swam from view, he slipped into the deeper shadow which every shadow everywhere contains within itself, and found a stairway to the street. After that he had but to

whip round the nearest corner, still keeping at the bottom of his shadow, pass under the tracks and turn to the left, and he had arrived at the other station.

"Can I get a wire through to Napoleon, Ohio, at this hour?" he asked the telegraph man.

But there was no way. The agent at Napoleon was in bed. He could arrive at the window at a quarter of six and still meet the morning train.

"That's out," said Donovan. "Isn't there another railroad?"

"There is, but it won't help you any."

"All right! That's out too. Where can I get hold of a public telephone?"

"Whom do you wish to reach in Napoleon?" asked the telegraph operator then.

Donovan gave the name of a man residing in Washington Street one door east of the courthouse.

"Oh, him! I know that fellow. I don't mean I know him personally, but I certainly do by his title. Everybody knows that man. He will have a telephone."

"I'm catching the 4:15, and I might not get hold of him by then. How does this sound? Suppose I wire him from here. Couldn't you drive through the message by long distance, since you can't get hold of your operator?"

"Sure I could—an emergency message."

"Emergency, then, and this is what it will be."

And he wrote down the sentences he had framed and the words of the overflow beyond.

Donovan's return to his cranny among the

trucks, like his departure from it, was made along the bottom of a shadow. But upon reaching his post he became bolder. He lighted another pipe—lighted it openly, without shielding the match with his hand. Barker was not in sight.

Time passed. The Toledo train was announced. The engine backed up to be coupled to its cars. Through the windows of the lighted day coach could be seen the passengers. Traffic that morning was not heavy; he would have no trouble finding a seat, nor would Barker. For he did not doubt that Barker, too, would become a passenger upon the train.

It pleased him to show himself to Barker by going direct to the ticket window. Barker proved to be seated, as Donovan had guessed he would be, upon a bench commanding the central entrance. Donovan received his change; then walking boldly across the room, he inserted his toll key in his locker and removed his bag. After that he went to his train. He seated himself toward the rear of the first coach, right-hand side. His bag he placed upon the floor between his feet.

Time passed—an hour, the better part of another. The conductor took up his ticket. Barker he knew had followed him into the car. But nothing had happened. Then suddenly the man sank into the seat beside him and thrust the muzzle of an automatic against his ribs. The action was covered, but firm.

“Listen, youse!” Barker ripped out venomously from behind his open hand. “I got you dead! Now

cough up the ice you grabbed off of the clothes-line on me!"

"I thought you were never coming," replied Donovan in his softest voice.

Barker failed to notice either the knots in the remark or the restraint of the smile that accompanied it.

"Put your digits on the seat ahead," he snapped. "Spread 'em wide! Now listen close. Where did you hide them out?"

"Hide what out?"

"The blinders you got on the roof. Say! Do I have to teach the infant class?"

"If you mean the diamonds, you'll find them in my bag, done up in a red handkerchief."

"Keep your other hand where you got it. Now reach down and give me that bag." Donovan obeyed directions. "Now put back your hand. How do you open her up?"

"Lift the latch at each end and press the slide. You can do it with one hand. It isn't necessary to shove your pistol into my ribs with that violence. What if it should go off?"

"You'd be out of luck," snarled Barker.

"In the red handkerchief. That's it. But I must correct you in one respect. You spoke of the diamonds as yours. They are not yours."

"Quit the fanning," said Barker. "Don't chew sounds at all."

The man with the welted scar across his chin tried to peer into the parcel, but the knots were too

hard and, after feeling of it, he stowed it away in a pocket.

"You have the jewels," Donovan went on. "You have the bag. What else do you want of me? I'm leaving the train at Napoleon. We're due there now."

"You ain't leaving nothing nowhere, hi-jacker. You're going on a long ride."

Donovan again smiled a pained smile, and again he spoke in softer tones:

"It looks to me, Barker, or Boker, or Baker, as if you had been losing your sleep. You're talking foolishness."

"Say, who are you, anyhow?"

"You're talking foolishness and acting foolishness. A diamond thief, and no alibi ready? Besides, don't you see, you can't shoot me here. This is out in the country. Where would you go? The Maumee bridge?"

"Cut out the funnimonkey bunk!" Barker commanded. But Donovan noted a look in his bright eyes that had not been there when he sat down.

"Stolen goods, and no alibi ready! Do you call that intelligent? Bruner is already under arrest in Chicago. Yet you blunder ahead. Practically under arrest yourself! Yet you talk about giving me a ride."

"Not by you I ain't!"

"Not by me—true. But by officers of the law. The sheriff of this county is seated behind you at this minute. He had to drive fifteen miles before 5:30 this morning, in order to catch this train; and

WILLIAM J. NEIDIG

I suspect his pistol has been covering you as long as yours has me. I should have had him arrest you at the county line, but I couldn't get past your alibi. I couldn't prove you had stolen anything. Now I have you with the goods."

"It's the bunk!" cried Barker.

"You're a fox—in Chicago. Give you an alibi and put wheels under you, you'll do. But not in the country. I have you with the goods. A nod of my head and into the hoosgow you go."

"You got to show me!"

"You're looking at my hands. Look at my head. I am about to nod it—like this!"

The next moment Barker saw his mistake. Even as Donovan spoke came a response from the seat behind.

"Drop that gun on the floor, and drop it quick!" said the sheriff of Henry County.

Barker was out of practice, but he dropped the pistol. The handcuffs followed, and the incident was closed. Or almost closed. As the man was removed from the train the station agent handed the sheriff a telegram addressed in his care to Donovan. The message read as follows:

BRUNER WILL BE ARRESTED BY POLICEMAN PAT
GONZALES AT BREAKFAST. O'DAY

Donovan passed it to his host. "I had him already arrested."

"What I don't see," said the sheriff over his own breakfast coffee somewhat later—"what I

don't see is, how the diamonds could ride into Fort Wayne on the roof of a Pullman when the parcel that Bruner dropped stayed in Chicago."

"The parcel that Bruner dropped didn't," said Donovan. "The parcel the police thought he dropped had been planted in advance. Bruner's diamond parcel fell through to the car roof out of sight. I heard it fall."

"But the tracks are roofed over at Van Buren Street."

"True; but the roof over each track is supplied with an open smoke vent along the center. Bruner dropped the diamonds through this vent."

THE UNREPENTANT THIEF

By
John B. Kennedy

MORTON found the man squatting like an ordinary beggar on those deceptively shallow waves of stone that roll between wild iron fountains to the pillars of St. Peter's. His clothes were decent and he was unburdened by the usual trays of pious gimcracks displayed to tempt pilgrims. His lean brown cheeks spread in a sardonic smile, and to Morton's surprise he spoke in perfect English, jerking a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the great black gate to the Vatican.

"They will not let you in, eh?" he laughed with a chattering sound from his white teeth. "It is too hot and the saints are sleeping."

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He laughed again. The pikeman guarding the gate in his ribboned costume of yellow, red and blue heard that laugh. His pikehead glinted in the coppery sunlight as he turned to glare.

"I am the only man," said the squatter to Morton, "who ever broke into that tomb of the living without challenge by those gaudy wastrels."

Morton thought for a moment he had run into one of those mad poets to be found in Rome who recite aloud when people will listen and to themselves when people will not. The afternoon was dead with heat; the Quirinal was closed; no loafers were bold enough to bake on the marble portico of the magnificent blasphemy of Victor Emmanuel. Its gold and glass glinted mockingly at the black battlements of Sant' Angelo above the Tiber, as Morton and his stranger wound through yellow streets to an inn where, the stranger claimed, the wine was cool and cheap.

"I am a famous thief," the stranger said in a subdued tone that yet held a braggart touch as he plucked clippings from a frayed pocket folder. The clippings were in French, of which tongue Morton knew the elements that enable an average American newspaper correspondent to pick a sketchy substance of a story. Morton gulped his first glass of wine and sipped at the second, wondering if he would find a dog-day story or an hour's entertainment or merely mild alcoholic relief from the unbearable sun. His day report would not have to be filed until six o'clock, and until the wafer-thin Roman evening papers he had

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nothing but Sahara climate and a vague papal indisposition to report.

So he sipped wine and listened.

"That is my name there," said the stranger, his brown face bright, his eyes hard with eagerness. "This is the report, as doubtless you recognize, of the robbery of the Raphael Duc de Veruzzi from the Musée at Lyons.

"That, I did," he smiled, accepting one of Morton's Milano cigarros, ugly twists of coarse tobacco like bent thumbs.

"And that is why I am in Rome, permanently," said the stranger. "For I did not contemplate stealing that Duc de Veruzzi from Lyons. No. My commission was to acquire the Muratti masterpiece of The Unrepentant Thief. You have heard of that magnificent picture? No? It is not as well known as many inferior works of Muratti.

"A great maker of chocolate in Lyons had purchased it from a thief in Milan, we learned—that is, I and my associates. Noble fellows, those, and one of them now on Devil's Island for abominable clumsiness. You understand, we were thieves of art and artists at thievery. You could leave your watch and your money in my keeping here, friend, and it would be safe as in your pockets—safer, for there are nimble-fingered gentry in Rome.

"We learned that this manufacturer of chocolate had placed the picture in the Musée at Lyons. We had exact measurements of frame and canvas. There was difficulty—not getting into the Musée at night, for I had hidden there all day in

a hollow replica of the tomb of Barbarossa; the difficulty was in getting out. My pocket torch failed just after I had located the picture. Cutting it skillfully from the frame, I picked my way through room after room and escaped—would you believe it?—through the huge front doors after dexterous work on the head of a night watchman.

“That afternoon, the newspapers mocked what had already been my humiliating discovery. I had stolen the Raphael of the Duc de Veruzzi. Annoying, of course. But more annoying was the information that the Duc had only recently been placed in the Musée to occupy the spot vacated by Muratti’s Unrepentant Thief, which had been secretly returned by order of the government to Florence.

“Disposing of the Duc for a sum that permitted my disappointed associates to drink themselves into the hands of the police, and me to live little better than a beggar here in Rome, I made it my life resolve to obtain the Muratti.

“In Florence I haunted the municipal gallery and bribed my way to search the private galleries, for had I asked too many questions suspicion would have been aroused. Learning that its real owner, Signor del Toso, enormously rich maker of munitions for the war, had withdrawn it from public display, fearing attempts to steal it, I investigated.

“One night I entered his house and stalked through his long hall of exquisite things. There were so many treasures to steal that I was almost tempted to delay search for the particular jewel

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I sought. Suddenly a footfall came behind me. It was a tall man in servant's uniform. Before I could wield this little toy—a blackjack, yes—he had gripped my wrist.

“‘You want the Muratti Unrepentant Thief?’ he said to me. And when I said yes, he laughed.

“‘I want it myself,’ he said, ‘and it isn’t here.’

“He told me that he had studied to be a butler for months, many months. And that he would remain a butler, for years, many years. He had become a butler to steal the Muratti picture. But this Signor del Toso had sent away the picture. And this butler took it as a sign and became converted.

“He told me The Unrepentant Thief was in the Vatican, a gift to the Pope, in the Pope’s private apartment.

“So to Rome I came—alone, to steal a picture from the Pope. Madness, I know. But to me life was empty without this accomplishment. This picture which so few of the outside world knew, but which was so precious that, having been stolen once, a mighty republic could order its restoration, this picture that was accepted by the Pope himself—the stealing of this would be the crown of my career as a thief.

“I waited in Rome for weeks before I decided to make the attempt. Posing as a pilgrim I obtained access to the inmost corridors of the Vatican, even to the private audience chamber. But I saw that there was ample means of getting into the front part of the palace.

"More weeks passed before I had solved the riddle of access and exit. Picking a moonless night, a night of drizzle, I put my plan to work.

"There was an old gardener whom I enticed to come to this very place and drink wine with me. He drank too much, as I planned. I borrowed his badge on a pretext and left him here sleeping in wine, in this very cubicle, I think. There was no difficulty passing the watchman at the rear gate of the Vatican gardens, for he kept out of the rain in his hut and merely nodded as I flashed the badge.

"The way was clear. Up a rear stone stairway I climbed, flight after flight, until it seemed my head would bump into the roof of that colossal place. A gap of gray in the blackness was access to the Court of Heraclius. Feeling my way by rows of marble pillars I came to the door always left open for His Holiness and those of his personal staff who might care for exercise in the court by day or night.

"Marble and bronze busts stared at me as I picked a path over rich carpets, passing through room after room.

"Twisted shafts of purest white marble marked the entrance to the heart of the Vatican, where the Pontiff dwelt. Toward a paler light I hurried. Then came a sight that struck me to stone. It had never entered my plans that at an hour beyond midnight the Holy Father would be up and at work. His heavy white figure sat at a huge desk, a gaint crucifix before him, its ivory Christus

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pale in the light of a bronze-bowled lamp. The Supreme Pontiff read a missal.

"His head, capped by a white silk zuchetta, did not move as his eyes looked up and saw me. For heavy moments, so, the Holy Father regarded me. I knelt by instinct and words left my lips. The Pope arose, extended his hand in blessing and spoke in a low voice.

"'What troubles you, my son?' he said, in French.

"There I knelt, dumb. I saw his red slippers advance slowly.

"His jeweled hand fell on my head. The awfulness of my plight fell on me and filled me with dismay. Chokingly, the Pope's hand on my head, I told him why I was there: that I was a thief and that I had come to steal the picture of The Unrepentant Thief.

"The hand on my head was a strong hand. Its fingers held my skull and turned up my face. The Pope smiled.

"'You shall see the Thief,' he said.

"He made me rise. He smiled and pointed to a corner of the room where stood a stalled prie-dieu, like a confessional. As I advanced, His Holiness walked to the richly draped wall and pressed a button. A thin light fell over the chair and I looked—at my bloodless face in a mirror!

"As I turned to him, the Pope still smiled.

"'That is the picture,' he said softly, 'but of a repentant thief.'

"He blessed me once more, and I left as I had

come. The guard was snoring beneath his towering busby."

The stranger tossed off his fifth glass of wine and replaced the clippings in his shabby wallet.

Morton paid for the pile of saucers. In the brazen sun of late afternoon he came to his office on Via Vittorio.

His superior, Hatrick, was there, tired and impatient. Morton poured out his tale. Hatrick heard it. At its conclusion he yawned.

"Did he make a touch?"

"Only fifty lire," said Morton.

"Charge that to expense and your time to experience," said Hatrick. "That lad's our best exported Chicago racketeer."

THE MOLL-TRAP

By
Howard McLellan

IRON MAN McCLOSKEY'S

right shoe lit upon the first and lowest granite step at the entrance to headquarters. Its oversized, square-toed sole squeaked to the task of lifting his ponderous but evenly proportioned figure up the steps. The pleasant memory of a satisfying breakfast, eaten three-quarters of an hour earlier, lingered. But the mind of the chief inspector of the detective division was otherwise occupied as he strode toward his desk to take up his daily grind of weaving disaster for guilty, hunted breakers of the law.

His head was down and his eyes fixed upon the familiar steps when the pompous, waxy-faced lit-

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tle bail-chiseler, Cuffy Palumbo, descending stealthily, stepped directly and brazenly into the Iron Man, who looked up, startled. Plunging his hands into the lower pockets of his tricky, double-breasted vest and twiddling his thumbs, the bail-bond peddler stood officiously and impudently blocking the inspector's path.

"Pounding the Big Boy hard, ain't they?" he addressed the Iron Man with a taunting twang.

"Newspapers pound to-day and praise to-morrow," McCloskey came back in a professionally affable manner. Inwardly, though, he winced. The smile was meant to screen his rising anger. Newspapers were hammering him for the long delay in rounding up the Taxi Killer.

"Yeah, I know," sneered the Chiseler, "but gimme a listen. When you get that Taxi Killer, airplanes'll be selling for a nickel. As for his lady side-kick, the Pink Moll, she's salted. What a run-around she'll give you."

"Is zat so?" McCloskey grinned, hiding again a sudden flash of anger and a shock that had made his heart pound. So this Chiseler knew about the Pink Moll. Outside of himself and his deputy inspector, Mahan, no one, he had believed, knew they had linked her with the Taxi Killer. The department was keeping her dark. They hadn't been able to locate her. He exploded a forced, mechanical laugh to conceal his amazement and, at the same time, feign indifference to the Chiseler's taunt.

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"Yeah, Big Boy, you can laugh it off," the bail peddler grinned, "but you heard me."

"I heard the sound of your voice but I don't get anything out of it," the inspector retorted with sham good humor. The Chiseler shot back some bantering reply McCloskey didn't catch. His thoughts for the moment were concerned with the woman in a pink organdie dress, attired as for a summer's day outing or a dance, who was in the taxi with the Killer that night he blazed at two cops and killed them, then, fleeing in the dark, sprayed the sidewalk with bullets, one of which found Detective Sergeant Johnny White, who was hiding in a dark areaway, firing from ambush at the fleeing Killer.

The bullet had entered White's lungs.

He alone of the three cops who had given battle to the Killer remained to tell McCloskey of the woman in pink who accompanied the slayer. And now, uninvited, in a boasting taunt, Palumbo, the Chiseler, had mentioned her. His sudden, hidden anger gave way to an abruptly rising sense of satisfaction, for what the Chiseler said confirmed Johnny White's story, whose accuracy might have been questioned because Johnny had caught only a fleeting glimpse of the woman at the moment he fell, half-dazed by the impact of the Killer's bullet.

Palumbo was a shrewd little trickster. He beat his competitors in the bail racket by adroit moves. He didn't wait until the crooks were pinched, to ask his bail business. He bored into gangs, played

and plotted with them, before and after their crimes were committed, keeping a long jump ahead of his competitors. He was probably, McCloskey told himself, in touch with the Killer and his Pink Moll.

A sudden impulse gripped McCloskey. Palumbo was still spouting his taunts, snickering derisively. The inspector stretched forth his big hand to grab the little man's shoulder. Then he withdrew it.

"Listen, little missionary," he said, "there's two big marble slabs hanging on the walls just inside those doors you come out of." The inspector nodded toward the entrance to headquarters. "On them slabs are the names of sixty-two cops killed by the kind of birds you trail with. For every name there's a stick of lumber, sometimes as many as three, sticking up out of graves in the prison cemetery at Sing Sing."

The Chiseler, at first frightened, broke into a taunting snicker again. McCloskey went on slowly, icily:

"So far in this town we ain't had a woman cop-killer, but I'm taking your word for it that there *is* a moll hooked up with this Taxi Killer. Maybe I can grab her and give your business a little boost."

McCloskey's finger caught the lapel of Palumbo's coat and flipped it saucily.

"Applesauce," the Chiseler snarled back at him and drew away. McCloskey's hand reached out

again to grab him but the man was bounding down the steps. For an instant McCloskey was tempted to run after him. He caught himself turning to leap down the steps, and stopped stock still. His eyes followed the Chiseler as he hastened along the sidewalk, laughing loudly. Then he smiled.

"No," he thought, "I'll play my regular game. I won't rough-house that little runt. Why get nasty with such a helpful little guy?"

Sure, he was the bagman for the town's professional murder mobs. He got them bail, lawyers, fixed cases for them, spirited away witnesses, arranged fall money to get them out of town. Yet his kind helped the police.

McCloskey's mind speedily appraised that helpfulness. A bail-bond peddler's chief source of revenue is arrests. Arrests mean bail. Cops make the arrests. When arrests are not being made the bail-bond business necessarily suffers a slump. Then it is that chiselers like Palumbo adopt pulmotor methods to pump life back into their failing business. A simple operation. The peddler whispers into the ear of a friendly and ambitious dick that such-and-such a customer of his, badly sought by the police, is hiding at such-and-such a place. Instantly there is business for both—a pinch for the dick and a bail-bond to write for the peddler.

It was from such a business-building mission, McCloskey suspected, as his eyes caught the figure of Palumbo turning the corner, that the impudent little Chiseler might have been coming when he bumped into him on the stairs. "He'd chisel the

feet and arms off Justice," he muttered to himself. "He's dirty—but he's useful too."

The Iron Man, remembering the Chiseler's taunts, turned and pounded up the steps. He stamped down the corridor toward his office. He was, as those who stepped out of his path whispered to one another with a cautioning smile, "all steamed up."

McCloskey's wrath fell with torrential suddenness upon Deputy Inspector Mahan. The deputy, a shy and quiet-voiced man, had smiled himself meekly into the Iron Man's office for their usual first-thing-in-the-morning pow-wow. McCloskey, fresh from his informative but pride-baiting encounter with the Chiseler, was at his desk, seated in his swivel chair, looking blankly out of the window. He did not see his deputy enter. Mahan seated himself in front of his chief's desk and noisily shuffled a sheaf of papers in his hand.

The Iron Man turned suddenly and glowered at Mahan. The chief inspector's wavy, steel-gray hair looked as though it had served with distinction as a battle ground for two Kilkenny cats. His lower lip was held tightly between two rows of large, white teeth. His long, thin fingers gripped the edge of his desk as if he were about to spring at his mild-mannered visitor. The rampage started.

"What have we got around here—a lot of milk-fed babies?" he bellowed. "Things have come to a pretty pass when a man in my position has to stand

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up and take guff from a scummy little bail-chiseler."

Mahan squirmed uneasily under the impact. McCloskey noted his assistant's discomfiture through eyes calloused to that sort of thing.

"What are your men doing?" he thundered on. "Still trying to tail this Taxi Killer around the streets till he connects up with the Pink Moll?"

The deputy nodded and spoke, timidly. "Four men are tailing him now," he said.

"You ought to know better than that," the Iron Man snapped. "The time you could shadow a fox like this Killer has gone. Too many damned automobiles. You can't tail a one-legged peddler around these days. He'd hop into an automobile. Call off your tails, Mahan."

The deputy moved to arise, eager to seize the opportunity to step out from under his chief's wrath and put his order into effect instantly. But McCloskey raised a detaining hand.

"Sit where you are," he barked. Mahan slumped into the chair. "Not a sign of the Pink Moll?" he queried.

Mahan shook his head.

"I coulda told you that," McCloskey said. "This mob-sister has got class to her. When she goes out on the kill she dresses like she was headed for a pink-tea party. She ain't gonna meet up with any tramp like this Killer, on the street, where you or anybody else can see her."

McCloskey's voice had modulated a little. He went on with an easy swing. Mahan, relieved by

the lowering of his chief's voice, bent forward to listen with reverent attention.

"Get off that stuff that she's in love with this Killer," McCloskey went on. "He's only her tool. She's got brains and class. If she ever meets up with him it's in the dark. Sure he's in love with her. A bum like him would be. But she's just playing him for a sucker. She collects dough from some swell mob for these killings. She gives this Killer rent money and pockets the big stuff for herself.

"He's satisfied. He thinks she's wild about him. He's got the notion that he's doing all the killing for the love of her. She's wise to this and she plays him along. But meet a tramp like him in the open? Bunk, Mahan!" McCloskey brought a fist down on the table. "Tails are out, it's heads we want to grab her." He paused.

"Why not go out and take the Killer?" Mahan suggested timidly. "We got him spotted. He'd squawk."

"Rats!" boomed McCloskey. "Do you think that bird'd let himself be taken alive by *cops*, Mahan, when they know he's bumped off two of their kind? And wouldn't that kind of set-up be nice—for the Pink Moll? That'd close his trap forever and she'd dance out and get herself a brand-new killer.

"No, Mahan, we'll rig up an old-fashioned plant to get this Killer and his Moll. Where's Roaring Johnny White?"

"He signed back for duty on the Homicide

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Squad yesterday," said Mahan, puzzled. "But he's far from a well man. I was going to give him an easy desk job. He's only out of the hospital three weeks. It'd raise hell with——"

McCloskey cut him short. "He's the man for the plant, Mahan," he said decisively.

Mahan stared at the inspector, alarmed. McCloskey hurried on:

"He's the only man that ever got a look at the Pink Moll. He got that flash of her in the taxi that night he was hit. She couldn't see him. Neither could the Killer. Johnny was hidden. He'd know both of 'em in a minute."

"But," cut in Mahan, "they only took the bandages off his chest day before yesterday. And maybe you didn't hear that Johnny was losing his voice. That bullet hit his windpipe too. The surgeons say he may lose his voice entirely."

"Tough," McCloskey mumbled. "Tough, but that's another reason why Johnny ought to go out on this plant. He won't need a voice for this job. Just eyes. He can fix himself up cozy in a room in Tom Cat Alley across from where the Killer hangs out, and lay there till the Pink Moll makes an undercover call on him. And listen, Mahan: if Johnny does lose his voice, we'll have to put him on the shelf at half pay. He's a sergeant now. If he comes through on this job, I'll get him raised to a lieutenant. Then we can shelve him at a lieutenant's pay. That's something to aim at, ain't it?"

"That's swell of you, Chief, to fix that for

Johnny. But here's something more: Johnny's expecting an increase in the family. He told me yesterday he expected his first kid soon. He wanted me to fix him up so he could get a two-day lay-off when the event was coming off."

"Well, what of that?" McCloskey shot back tartly. "Maybe he'll be able to go home to the missus and kid as a lieutenant."

"I'll put it up to Johnny," said Mahan with a note of misgiving in his voice.

"You'll put it up to him!" roared McCloskey. "You'll give Roaring Johnny orders and they'll be these: to take that plant and stick night and day till that Pink Moll comes in."

The deputy's head dropped forward. An easy-going old-timer, he served as buffer between the Iron Man and the men who worked in the field. He hated to order a convalescent detective to the rigors of a tedious night-and-day plant. His head shot erect suddenly when the Iron Man spoke again.

"Tell me, Mahan," asked McCloskey with a questioning frown, "did they get the bullet out of Johnny's lungs?"

"It's still there," replied the deputy, puzzled.

McCloskey leaned forward over his desk. "Mahan," he said slowly, "when I was a green man on the street they put a bullet in me. It took me two years to get the guy that plugged me, but I grabbed him. Now Johnny White's still got that bullet in him, ain't he?"

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"I get you," the deputy said, then, grinning significantly, he rose and moved toward the door.

For more than a month Roaring Johnny White with cat-like patience had kept his eyes riveted on the Killer's shabby little room on the upper floor of a tumble-down, two-story tenement in Tom Cat Alley. Now, at ten minutes past midnight of the thirty-fourth day of his vigil, he sat watching his man. He was weary. But his red-lidded eyes were aflame as they spanned the darkness of the narrow, squalid alley. He had drawn a wobbly table up to the window of his room. On this his elbows rested while, chin pocketed in hands, he sat sphinx-like and gazed at the Killer. On the wall near the end of the table hung a calendar with the four days of his second month's vigil crossed out. On a corner of the table stood a pair of field glasses. Flattened out on the table lay a sheet of paper with faintly penciled writing on it—a note from his wife, whose face he had not looked upon since his vigil began.

The Killer had come home for the night—alone, as usual. The watch had been fruitless. The detective had given up hope that the Pink Moll would ever show up.

As he sat staring across the alley, the lighted window in the Killer's room went blotchy before his eyes. The constant strain was telling on his sight. In the loneliness of the bare room he began

to talk to himself in a low, rasping whisper. It pained his throat even to whisper.

"What the hell!" he groaned. "I've lost my voice, my eyes are going. When will this thing let up?"

His hands fell limply from his chin. One of them fell upon the note on the table and clutched it. His tortured eyes lowered from the window to the note, but in the darkness saw only a blurred white square. He couldn't flash on a light and read his message. That would spot him to the Killer. The light hardly mattered. He could recall word for word what his wife had written. She was at the hospital now. . . . They expected the baby to-morrow night. . . . Would he be there when the baby came? And did the bullet pain him and was his voice growing better?

His thoughts hung upon those two questions. He repeated them. What if she knew the bullet tormented him and kept him from sleep each night when sleep was his greatest necessity? And what if she knew that not only was his voice fading to a gurgling, choking whisper, but his eyes, too, were bothering him terribly? Thank God, she had been spared this gloomy news!

He asked himself how he could sneak away safely and see her, if only for a few minutes. He meditated for a moment trying to find a plan to do so, but quickly dismissed the idea. It was always when cops on fixed posts stole away for a few minutes that something happened.

There was no escape. Roaring Johnny saw that

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plainly. There was no escape until the Pink Moll showed up in that room across the street, or—something happened to the Killer. If either of those eventualities came to pass, it would have to be within the next twenty-four hours if they were to release him in time to be on hand at the bedside of his wife, to share with her the job of cuddling their first-born.

Roaring Johnny's hands dropped from his face and fell palms downward on the table. An impulse jolted his head erect. His gaze shot out of the window again to find the Killer. The man was still sitting on the bed. The man who was causing his misery, holding him a prisoner, robbing him of what was to be one of the supreme joys of life, sat scarcely more than thirty feet away. Darkness lay between them. The evil hand that had fired the bullet into his lungs was gripping the iron piping of the bedstead.

Suddenly he stood up. His eyes did not leave the Killer's window. "I could tell 'em at the office," he whispered, "that the bird was making his get-away and I had to act quick." He gripped the butt of his regulation .45 and yanked it from its holster. Then he lifted the gun to the window. His hands trembled. "I'll grab a bead on his shoulder, wing him in the gun arm," he deliberated, "and then go over and take him."

His arm stiffened as he poised his gun on the cross-arm of the window sash. He tried to draw a bead along the barrel. The sights jiggled as the gun wavered in a trembling hand. He tightened

his grip, drew a deep breath, and stiffened his body. Then——

A piercing pain stabbed him in the chest. With lightning speed it traveled to his shoulder, then, with paralyzing force, sped down his arm. He uttered a sharp groan. His arm went limp. The finger on the trigger relaxed. His eyes closed tight. His temples throbbed. Darkness swirled around him, and he slumped into the chair at the table. His face sank into his arms outstretched upon the table. A hot cheek flattened out against the piece of white paper on the table—the note from his wife.

Voices in the dark alley below startled Roaring Johnny out of his daze. He opened his eyes. Then his head shot up with a jolt. His pistol lay upon the table, one hand resting near it limply. Gees! What had happened? Had he fired at the Killer—and then gone delirious? He couldn't recall the sound of a shot. He sniffed the air for the acrid fumes of burned powder. Had he fired—and missed?

He raised his frightened eyes and looked across the alley. The Killer was standing at the window, peering into the alley below.

"I fired and missed him," the detective rasped. in self-protection he had better fire at him again. The Killer stood where he could get him this time. His hand groped along the table for his revolver and encountered the piece of white paper. A woman screamed in the alley. The voice of the Killer barked.

"Hey, you dirty rat, lay off that woman," it

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sang out. The woman screamed again. The detective saw a pistol gleaming in the Killer's hand. "Lay off or I'll plug you with this," the Killer growled.

Roaring Johnny lowered his eyes to the alley. Dimly in the darkness he saw the form of a man standing in the middle of the alley, with his arm upraised to strike a woman who was struggling to her knees. The woman's face lifted to the Killer in the window and she roared at him in thick, drunken tone: "G'wan, keep your nose out of this, you big bum!"

"Get the hell out of this alley," the Killer thundered back. The woman let out an agonizing cry as the man's fist fell upon her head.

"Serves you right," yelled the Killer. "Wouldn't let a guy do you a favor, huh?" Then he closed the window and snapped out the light.

The detective stared into the darkness. Queer mug, the Killer, he mused. Would kill a guy to do a drunken alley-cat a favor. A swell kind of a favor. Then the words of McCloskey tumbled into his mind: "This man's not an ordinary killer. He kills for the love of the Pink Moll. If you wait long enough something will turn up that'll bring the Moll and the Killer into your hands. Watch that room and use your bean. Brains get good dicks more than bullets will."

Roaring Johnny seized his revolver and snapped it back into its holster. "I might 'a' hit him in the lungs," he muttered. "I know what that means. I wouldn't wish that torture on a dog."

His brain was clear now. Across the street his man had gone to bed. The brawling couple had slouched out of the alley. Alone, peering into the darkness, his thoughts, no longer confused, revolved around the strange man across the street—a Killer ready to kill a man to protect a drunken woman!

An hour later the silence of early morning in Tom Cat Alley was broken by two pistol shots fired in quick succession from the corner where the squalid alley met a clean wide street. The shots were followed by the clatter of heavy feet running over the flinty cobblestones which unevenly surfaced the narrow alley. A man, with a smoking pistol in his hand, crept through the heavy shadows of the alley. Then he slouched into the black recess of the doorway under the Killer's window.

The upper sash of the window rattled and was lowered with a squeaking noise. The Killer's head was thrust through the opening.

"What in hell's the racket?" he demanded. In his right hand he held a metal object which clicked against the windowpane.

"Don't use that rod," the low, panting voice in the doorway pleaded. "The bulls are on me. Gees, man, do me a favor. Let me in."

"What you picking on *that* door for?" the Killer snarled.

"I gotta make the roof," the man cried in the hoarse whisper of a hunted creature. "I wanta scatter. I winged one of the bulls, I think. Give me

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a break, old man, before they massacre me."

A shrill whistle sounded; then another. The bulls were on the jump. The man in the doorway was being hunted. The Killer knew what that meant. And the frightened voice spoke in the language of the gunman. He'd do the poor devil a favor and let him in. He couldn't let him stop in that doorway and draw the cops like a magnet. Quickly he hauled himself out of the window and in his bare feet pattered downstairs. He opened the door.

"Get up the stairs," the Killer commanded. "You can make the roof from there." The bare feet pattered up the stairs, the stranger following. At the head of the stairs, in the deeper darkness, the man bumped into the Killer.

"What happened?" growled the Killer eagerly.

"They flushed me off a job," the man whispered. "At the corner of the alley I let 'em have two, and I think I winged one of the bulls."

"What's your racket?" queried the Killer. He did not wait for a reply. Instead, he stepped back and stood listening at the head of the stairway. "Wait there," he commanded his visitor, "the bulls is near the door." His eyes were fixed upon the door below. "Stick where you are," he whispered to the man. "This means a battle. Is your gat loaded?" The Killer slanted his gun at the door.

"Me rod's empty," the man replied. "Used me last load to blaze away at 'em from the corner."

"I'll take care of 'em," the Killer boasted.

"Bulls is my meat. The first one that pokes his mug inside that door gets his."

"Gees, don't do that!" the man pleaded, moving toward the Killer and reaching out a hand in the dark to catch the Killer's hand. "Don't battle 'em. There's a dozen bulls down there now. You can't stand 'em off. Give 'em the bluff. They don't know I ducked in here. They're nosing around just on a chance."

A heavy hand pounded on the door.

"Nosing nothing," bellowed the Killer. He tightened his grip on his gun.

"I sucked you into this," the man pleaded. "Have you got a spare rod? I'll give you a hand."

"I ain't got a spare," the Killer replied.

"Let me take that one," said the man. His hand reached out for the Killer's revolver. "Gees, you don't need to mix in this. Give me the gun and I'll take the fight out to the roofs. I'll scatter—then you can open up and give 'em the sleepy ha-ha."

"Yeah, you'll have to have a loaded rod," whispered the Killer. "Here, take it." He thrust the gun into the man's hand. The man looked down at his hand and saw the glint of the mother-of-pearl handle of the Killer's gun.

"It's a swell rod," said the Killer. "I want it back. It's a keepsake from a swell dame that gave it to me."

"I could leave it at the house of one of your pals," the man suggested quickly. "If I don't get grabbed I'll bring it back myself to-day."

"Sure, that's an idea," said the Killer. "You

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could leave it with her. I gotta have it to-morrow."

"Her?" queried the man.

"Yes, the dame that give it to me," the Killer explained. "There's a ladder that leads to the roof down the hall. You'll come down in the next alley. Beat it south and turn up the first street on yer left. Travel along that stem five blocks till you hit Linden Street. Her house is number six-twenty-five. Give the bell a jingle. She'll answer. Tell her I sent you. Give her the gun. She'll know then I sent you. She might give you cover for the night too."

A deep voice sounded at the door below. "Open up!" it growled. This was followed by a pounding. There was a pause as the two men listened eagerly.

"Okay," whispered the man as he tiptoed toward the ladder. "Gees, you're a regular guy!"

An antiquated tingle-bell, dangling from a coil-spring in the rear of a hallway in an old red-brick house at 625 Linden Street, sounded. A tall, thin-faced woman lying outstretched upon a high-backed divan in a spacious, high-walled room off the hallway lifted herself lazily to a sitting position. Through blinking, half-opened eyes she squinted at a clock imbedded in the forehead of a marble tiger head on the mantelpiece. The clock said 2:15. The bell jingled again.

The woman's dark features twisted into a petulant, questioning frown.

She reached over her shoulder and pressed a button in the wall. The room which had been dimly

lit, was flooded with a soft red glow, revealing a room over-richly furnished.

She arose from the divan and catching the folds of a padded blue silk mandarin coat drew them together, covering a long pink silk nightrobe. Then she strode slowly to the front door, turned the key, and opened it as far as a short six-inch nightchain would permit. A man was standing in the doorway, a stranger.

She addressed him in an angry voice: "This is a nice time to come to my front door!"

The man stepped closer to the door. His hat was drawn down over his gray features. A growth of stubble darkened the lower half of his face.

"Pinkie?" he questioned in a hoarse, timid voice.

The woman glowered at the stranger. "Pinkie?" she repeated, shocked. "Where do you get that stuff? Who are you? What do you want?"

"I was sent up here by your friend in Tom Cat Alley," the man replied.

"My friend, in *Tom Cat Alley*!" she repeated in a tone pitched high with amazement and emphatic denial.

"Yeah, he said you was his friend," the man stammered. "He gave me this." He drew the pearl-handled revolver from his coat pocket and held it in a streak of light falling into the entrance way over her robed shoulder. "He said to show it to you," the visitor went on, "and you'd know I came right from him."

The woman eyed the gun intently, then spoke quickly, apprehensively.

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"Well, what does he want now?" she queried angrily.

"He's jammed. The cops has been nosing around his place. They left just as I come away from the alley. But he's worried. He says for you to come down."

"The nerve of him! He knows I never come down to Tom Cat Alley. What's eating him?"

The man raised his hand to the door and planted it against the edge. He pushed up the brim of his hat and studied the woman's face in thoughtful silence. He spoke with an uncertain drawl:

"I don't know, but I think the dame has got him worried."

"Dame?" the woman thundered angrily. "What dame?"

"The one that's with him down there. He was trying to quiet her down. That's all I know."

The woman's attitude changed from that of surprise to deep concern. "The fool," she muttered. Then, addressing the man: "Wait there a minute."

She turned quickly and hurried to the taboret in the hallway. A telephone stood on this. She lifted the receiver to her ear and jiggled the hook impatiently. She whispered a number into the mouthpiece. The man, who had bent his ear to the opening in the door, didn't catch the number. The woman seated herself on a stool and waited nervously for an answer. Then her voice spoke eagerly.

"Cuffy?" she queried. "That's good, dearie, I wasn't sure I'd get you, Sweetie, at this time of the night." She paused, then went on in a soft, apolo-

getic voice. "Well, I'm sorry. But listen, Sweetie. I had to call. What do you think? That fool in Tom Cat Alley is playing around with some strange skirt. That's dangerous, Cuffy. . . . How do I know? . . . He sent a messenger up to get me to come down right away. . . . Sure that's nerve, but we can't stand for that dame stuff. She might play hell with us, Cuffy. . . . What about the guy that brought the message? . . . Never saw him before, but he brought our friend's rod along to give me the highball."

The woman turned her head and shot a quick glance at the door. "He's at the door now. . . . Well, I'm going down pronto. You better come with me. . . . I can't go down to that dump alone. . . . Aw, come on, Sweetie. . . . You gotta help me. . . . It's your business, too. . . . Come on. . . . We gotta shoo that skirt away from him." A pause. "Telephone him? . . . He's got no phone. Come on, Sweet Boy, come along," she pleaded. Another pause. The woman lifted her dark eyes to the ceiling, then lowered them quickly and spoke again.

"Listen, Cuffy, it may mean business for you. . . . He's afraid of a jam. . . . We'll need you." She smiled. "Him squeal on me? Never. He's too crazy about me. You know who I like, Sweet Boy." A few seconds of silence, then: "That's the Sweetie. I'll pick you up in a taxi right away."

The woman hung up the receiver and strode toward the door. The man drew away from the door.

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"You going back to him?" she asked.

"Sure. I gotta give him back this gun."

"Tell him then that I'm coming down and bringing his friend Cuffy with me."

The door closed. The man danced down the steps.

Two policemen lumbering along their beat in the thick darkness at 3 A. M. saw a man standing on the corner of Tom Cat Alley apparently waiting for someone to join him. Suddenly his hand made a beckoning gesture at them. The pair quickened their stride and sped toward the man. As they closed in on him the man spoke in a coarse whisper.

"This was where those two shots were fired?" he asked.

"Yeah," bellowed the taller of the pair, peering at the man whose face was half hidden by the brim of his hat.

"There's going to be another shot inside the alley," the man rasped.

"What?" cried the cop in amazement.

"Yep. I'm going to fire that shot, too," whispered the man. The cop tightened his grip on his nightstick and gazed intently into the man's face. Then he drew back with a start.

"Roaring Johnny White!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing round here? I thought you was on sick leave."

"Never mind what I'm doing here," Roaring Johnny wheezed. "You two birds get across this

street and plant yourselves in a doorway where you can't be seen." The detective spoke rapidly but with great effort. "There'll be a taxi with a man and a woman in it," he went on. "It'll turn into this alley and stop at a door halfway down the block. When you see a shot blaze out of the window of the house they go into, come on in on the run. I'll leave the street door open. Have your gats ready and come upstairs. You'll find me there. I'll give orders. Quick, beat it across the street! The taxi'll be along in a minute."

Roaring Johnny turned into Tom Cat Alley. The two cops darted across the street and vanished into the doorway.

The detective halted at the door under the Killer's window. He pounded on it and while he stood waiting for the Killer to appear at his window his eyes moved to the window across the street where a few hours before he had writhed and groaned in agony. He quickly drew his eyes away from the window and looked up. The Killer was calling from above.

"It's me, Blacky," he whispered. "I'm bringing your gat back." He coughed. His throat burned. It pained him to whisper. In a few moments the Killer opened the door and admitted him.

"Everything's jake," whispered the detective. "Pinkie got excited when I told her about the cops. She's on her way down with a guy named Cuffy. She must be nuts about you."

"She is," grunted the Killer. He bounded up

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the stairs. "Come on up," he called to the detective. Roaring Johnny remained at the door, holding it slightly ajar. The sound of an approaching motor reached his ears. "They're coming," he cried at the Killer. He opened the door wide. The taxi was at the curb, halted. The woman, in a pink organdie dress, lowered her silken ankles to the running board, then bolted out of the taxi. In a quick glance she surveyed the shabby tenement and saw a light in the window above. Her eyes caught Roaring Johnny holding the door for her. Palumbo caught her arm, and the two brushed by the detective and scampered up the stairway.

"First door to the right," the detective directed. "This is a nice dump to bring me to," he heard Palumbo whine at the woman. Slowly and silently Roaring Johnny leaned his shoulder against the door and pushed it back. Leaving it half open he advanced up the stairway.

The door of the Killer's room opened, casting a shaft of light into the faces of the woman and her companion.

The Killer stood framed in the doorway, beaming. "Pinkie!" he cried gleefully. "Hello, Cuffy." He backed into the room, followed by the pair.

"What got into you?" the woman demanded angrily. Her eyes traveled quickly around the room. "Where's that skirt?" she shouted at him.

"Skirt?" the Killer repeated, astonished. His questioning eyes darted from the woman to the door. The figure of Roaring Johnny loomed in the

doorway. Palumbo, catching the detective's face and recognizing it, stammered a sibilant oath and snarled at the woman: "You dumb-bell! This is a frame."

"Sit down, all of you," the detective commanded, advancing a pace into the room. The pearl-handled revolver glistened in his hand. The Killer dropped to the bed. The woman slumped into a chair. Palumbo remained standing. He addressed the detective:

"Listen, Johnny, give me your ear in the hallway just a minute. This thing can be—" Roaring Johnny cut him short. "Stick there," he growled back at the Chiseler. He winced each time he spoke. His throat flamed.

"He came with me . . . just a friend," the woman put in plaintively, nodding at Palumbo.

"Yeah," whined the bail-bond peddler. "I just came along to make an honest dollar."

"A honest *what?*" rasped the detective. "Tell that to McCloskey."

The Killer spoke. "What's the use of dragging her in?" he asked. The woman leered at the Killer.

"I don't know this man," she cried. "He's trying to frame me. He's a nut."

"Fight that out with McCloskey," the detective whispered. "I just got one little promise to keep—then I'm through." He looked at the Killer. "I said I'd bring this fancy gat back to you," he went on. "Well, here it is. He lifted the gun, slanted it upward at the window and fired. A pane of glass

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crashed. The woman shrieked. Palumbo's face went white.

"I guess that's the last shot it'll fire," drawled Roaring Johnny. He slipped his hand under his coat and hauled out his service pistol. "You're lucky to be alive," he shot at the Killer in a cracked voice, as he leveled his own gun at him.

"There, Miss Pinkie," he whispered, and tossed the pearl-handled revolver into her lap. The woman glowered at him and swept the gun to the floor. The Killer made a lunge to grab it. His hand touched it caressingly.

"Leave it lay," the detective muttered, lowering the nose of his revolver at the stooped figure of the Killer. "It wouldn't do you no good. It's empty. But I get you. You want it as a keepsake of her." The detective grinned at the woman, then added: "Well, seeing you're so fond of her, go ahead and pick it up. I'm no guy to bust up a romance."

Heavy feet were pounding up the stairway. The detective stepped back a pace into the hallway. The two cops, panting, open-eyed, bounded eagerly at Roaring Johnny.

"Take in all three of them," the detective groaned. "Put 'em in separate rooms and hold 'em for McCloskey. Don't book 'em on any charge. That little Chiseler over there"—he indicated Palumbo—"would have a writ out before McCloskey got down." The detective gulped, then coughed. He went on haltingly, his face distorted from pain. "I'm leaving now. . . . I wanta get over . . . to the

hospital . . . see the wife and kid . . . before this voice . . . goes dead on me."

"What do you make out of this?" chortled Deputy Inspector Mahan, easing himself into a chair in front of McCloskey's desk. The Iron Man seated at his desk arched his eyebrows. Mahan went on:

"That little Chiseler hangs the whole thing on the Moll and the Killer. He says they killed the cops. The Killer hangs it on the Chiseler and says he never saw the Moll before in his life. He's lying. He's crazy about that woman."

"What about the Moll?" asked McCloskey.

"She says the Killer was alone in the killings," Mahan replied. "She says he is trying to frame Palumbo . . . is jealous of him because the Chiseler's her sweetie. And the Chiseler's willing to take the stand and squawk on the Moll and the Killer if we'll ease up the murder charge against him."

"Take a squawk from that rat?" McCloskey boomed. "Not on your life. He had his chance to speak his little piece to me on the steps that morning he got my goat."

The Iron Man brought the palm of his large hand down upon his desk with a whack. He spoke in a low, admonitory voice.

"Never trust the likes of Palumbo," he grinned at the deputy. "They're all chiselers. They hack the arms and legs off Justice. You can see for yourself, Mahan, that Palumbo is ready to chisel the heart out of Cupid. He'd spill against the Moll and

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send her to the chair. Sure he would. But we don't want his squeal. Roaring Johnny'll have his voice back—and when he takes the stand against the whole three, he'll tell plenty."

The Iron Man spoke in a soft, pleased voice. It was almost a purr.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH
HOUR

By
Jerome Beatty

THEY had been there for three hours, the girl and the man. It was now noon and a white-haired old Negro set the catch on the high carved doors that led from the Governor's regal anteroom, where they sat, out into the wide foyer. No more callers were admitted after noon on Saturdays.

As the morning passed many visitors had presented their names to the Governor's secretary, were admitted to the sanctum and had gone. There were state senators, representatives, a judge or two, fifteen members of the baseball team that had won the state championship, a delegation of club women

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who lodged a protest about something or other, the mayor of a near-by city who wanted the Governor to deliver a Memorial Day address.

But the Governor's secretary had ignored the two, now the huge room's only occupants, who sat in the high-backed throne-like chairs by the broad window.

The man shook his head in doubt. His name was Montgomery H. Latham and he was known as one of the greatest criminal lawyers in the state. He was a sturdy man of sixty, with bushy black hair. He was immaculate in a blue suit and gray gaiters. On a table beside him lay his camel's-hair topcoat and his brown velours hat.

"Looks bad," he said to the girl. "I'm afraid—"

"I'm not," she said sharply.

"We've got only a little more than twelve hours," he reminded her.

"*Fourteen* hours," she declared firmly. "Fourteen hours and," she looked at her wrist watch, "and twenty-six minutes!"

She rose and walked to the window. There was firmness in her carriage. In her soft brown eyes was a competent gleam and the pitch of her chin showed a fighting heart. She was young, she was beautiful, she was lithe—like a thoroughbred.

Hundreds of girls could sing and dance and deliver lines better than Alice Rankin but her's was the name that shone in electric lights, while the others still were in the chorus. She had charm. Not sex appeal, charm. When men and women

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looked at Alice Rankin they knew at once that she was all right.

Her fox fur was loose at her throat. She pushed back her coat and set her knuckles on her lips. Her tiny feet were apart and she looked out of the window at the world and defied it.

"After all," the lawyer said, "you must admit that we haven't a very strong argument for the Governor."

She did not turn her head. "Jack didn't do it," she retorted. "That's the strongest argument in the world. They don't hang innocent men."

Latham shrugged his shoulders and picked up a morning newspaper that he already had read four times.

The Governor ran a hand through his long, tawny hair and looked over the gold-rimmed glasses that perched perilously on the end of his nose.

"Did you want me, Governor?" The Attorney General had entered through a private door that led from a secret hallway into the Governor's office. The Attorney General was tall and gray and lean, and his mouth was small and hard.

"Yes, General," said the Governor.

"Sit down." He waved a hand toward a massive leather chair on the other side of the elaborately carved mahogany desk. "I was just talking to G. W.," indicating with a nod the Lieutenant Governor, who was sprawled out in another chair, chewing a long cigar.

The Attorney General lighted a cigarette, kicked a suitcase out of his way and dropped into the chair and crossed his knees.

"G. W. and I are going to drive to Pine Lake to spend Sunday," the Governor observed. "Want to go along?"

The Attorney General shook his head. "I bought a new set of matched clubs. My golf is getting good."

"We need a quart or two of rye," said the Lieutenant Governor. "Can you——"

"Sure. Stop at my house. I'll phone the missus." He looked inquiringly from the Governor to the Lieutenant Governor. "Is that why you got me in here?"

"Oh, no. I forgot for a moment." The Governor picked up a pencil and began to make crosses and squares on his blotter. "The Rankin girl is outside. Latham, Van Dyke's attorney, is with her. I'm rather inclined——"

The Attorney General threw his legs apart and lunged forward. He pounded a fist on the desk. "For crimeny's sake, Governor, don't be a fool!"

"That's what I told him," the Lieutenant Governor agreed promptly.

"I thought," the Governor offered, "I thought I might grant a stay of, maybe, a week."

The Attorney General was emphatic. "Jack Van Dyke is guilty. You've granted two stays already. The execution is set for tonight. Let him hang!"

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"The girl phoned my secretary this morning. She says she has absolute evidence that Jessie Duke is in town and that she'll have a statement from her before Monday."

"Jessie Duke!" the Lieutenant Governor laughed. "Ha!"

"That's the song and dance they gave you twice before," the Attorney General protested. "Don't be a sucker! The papers are riding you hard enough now, and if you mention Jessie Duke once more you'll be the biggest joke in the state. The cartoonists and funny writers haven't entirely forgotten yet and if you give them another opening—good night!"

"But just a week—" the Governor suggested.

"Don't you remember all those cartoons last Christmas when you gave Van Dyke a stay on this same cock and bull yarn?" the Attorney General declaimed. "How Jessie Duke must be Santa Claus and all that? We got an election in November, and if you don't sit tight the papers will Jessie-Duke us right out of these jobs. He shot Bernstein. Let him hang!"

"Sure," the Lieutenant Governor put in. "The jury said he was guilty, the Court of Appeals said he was guilty, everybody in this state agrees. There's been too much talk already about how Van Dyke will never hang because he's a rich man's son. You've given him almost a year——"

"Ten months," said the Governor. "This is the last of April."

"If they can't find their witness in ten months,"

the Attorney General sneered, "there isn't any witness."

"But there's Latham," the Governor began. "I don't want to offend him."

"Rats!" The Attorney General dismissed Latham with a wave of a hand. "Latham himself thinks Van Dyke is guilty. He's just going through the motion. He put up the best defense he could and now he's paid off and ready to wash up. Old Man Van Dyke and all the relatives believe the boy did it and are ready to let him ride. It's the Rankin girl that's keeping things hot. I'll bet a thousand dollars that Latham knows this Jessie Duke story is all a lot of hooey."

"I sort of feel sorry for the boy," said the Governor. "He's a nice kid."

"Humph!" the Attorney General snorted. "He's a Van Dyke. His father stole every cent he's got. The sisters are tramps. Society folks!" He snorted his disgust. "He murdered a man. Let him hang!"

"That's what I say," the Lieutenant Governor declared.

The Governor shrugged his shoulders. "All right, then," he agreed. "The sentence stands." He looked at the clock. "We better be going, G. W. Won't you change your mind, General?"

"Not me. I'm just about set to shoot me a ninety with my new clubs."

"Steel shafts?" the Governor asked.

"No, wood. You can't get——"

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"I changed to steel shafts," the Governor began, "and . . ."

While the man and the girl waited outside, alone in the big room, the question of steel shafts vs. wooden shafts was debated for fifteen minutes. When the argument reached an impasse the Governor picked up his bag and told his secretary to go out and say that under no circumstances would he interfere with the due process of law in the case of the State vs. John Van Dyke, legally convicted of the murder of Lucky Joe Bernstein, and sentenced by the court to hang at 2:30 A. M. on Sunday, April 28th. That moment now was less than fourteen hours away.

As the Governor's secretary opened the door, Alice whirled from the window and stepped toward him, her eyes seeking an answer. The Governor's secretary looked past her at Latham, who had risen slowly to his feet.

"Well?" the girl demanded.

"What news, Dockery?" Latham asked.

The secretary shook his head. "Nothing doing."

"He'll see us, though?" Alice asked quickly.

"I'm sorry. He's gone for the day."

"Gone! Where?" she protested.

"On a personal matter."

She seized his coat. "Where's he gone?" she snapped.

"Er—Pine Lake—to the hotel. Over Sunday."

"There's a telephone there, if we need him?" Latham asked.

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"Oh, yes. But, Mr. Latham, really—there's no hope. Really."

"No hope!" Alice disputed. "Don't talk nonsense. Jack didn't shoot Bernstein. They don't hang innocent men!"

"I trust not, Miss Rankin," the secretary offered.

She looked at her watch.

"Now, Dockery," Latham began, "don't you suppose we could catch the Governor? If I could just have a little talk with him, perhaps——"

"Never mind that talking thing," the girl interrupted sharply. "We have work to do. Come on!"

"I'm afraid we're sunk, Miss Rankin," said Latham. They were in his limousine, riding from the state capitol to his office.

She turned on him fiercely. "Are you going to be like all the rest?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, uneasily.

"You believe Van, don't you? You know there is such a person as Jessie Duke?"

"Of course." There was a strut in his voice as he added: "Didn't I establish that at the trial?"

She ignored his boast. "You know, don't you, that she saw the murder committed—that she knows who was standing behind Van and who did the shooting?"

"If we find her, Miss Rankin," he evaded, "she won't tell."

"She will tell," she muttered through clenched

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teeth. She gripped Latham's arm so tight that it hurt him.

"Well," he agreed, "if we find her, at least that may be sufficient to make the Governor give us another stay. But, Miss Rankin, the real murderer—" he paused, "if, er, if it——"

"If what?" she demanded. "Do you mean, if it wasn't Van?"

"No, no," he said hastily. "The real murderer knows that Jessie Duke saw him. Even if she wanted to tell, he and his gang would stop her. Look at this sensibly. We——"

"Sensibly!" she raged. "That's what has left Van without a friend but me—looking at it 'sensibly'! That stuffed shirt of a father of his and his sisters—they're being 'sensible.' Look at it sensibly! That's the alibi of quitters. They all believe he's guilty—everybody but me. Me—" she added, "and Jessie Duke and the man who really fired the shot. Van's people know that if he's freed he'll marry me—me, a musical comedy actress. They'd rather see him dead! And that isn't all! His sisters and the other relatives know that if Van dies they'll get more of the old man's money. What a fine lot of swine. *They're* murderers! Killing Van for his money!"

"You might as well be calm," Latham tried to soothe her. "Perhaps, as you say, we'll save him. But if we can't find Jessie Duke in time—I would advise you to prepare. The shock, I'm afraid——"

"I'm no quitter, Mr. Latham. I love Jack and

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he loves me and I'm a one-man dog. I'm going to get him out of there. I told him I would and he believes me. I'm going to make good!"

"Jessie Duke may be dead. They may have killed her."

"Why should that priest telephone me then?"

"He may not have been a priest," he suggested. "I'm afraid that it was some cruel practical joker."

"He said she was dying of tuberculosis and wanted to see me."

"But he was evasive. He would not tell his name, nor when you could see her, nor where. It doesn't hold water, that story."

"There's nothing the matter with that story. It was true talk. Those gunmen, he said, were going away over Sunday and probably I could sneak in and see her."

"Well," Latham resignedly gestured with his hands, "it will do no harm to hope." He looked at his watch. "At three o'clock, he was to call?"

"Yes, and he'll call, too."

"Umm," said Latham, as the limousine stopped at their destination.

They pushed through the group of reporters who were waiting in Latham's outer office.

"No news yet, boys," he said. "I may turn up something though. I'm working with might and main."

"Humph!" said Alice, who had gone on ahead.

They sat down in Latham's office and he glanced at the evening paper that lay on his desk. A

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headline all the way across the page read: VAN DYKE TO HANG BEFORE DAYBREAK.

Alice leaned forward.

"Liars!" she said.

She looked at the bronze clock on the desk.

"We'll get a call in five minutes," she predicted.

"He'll phone at three."

Latham was looking through some papers on his desk.

"Isn't it queer," he mused, "how little things affect lives? Here is a case that I am trying next month. If a man had not stopped to tie his shoe, he would be alive today."

"That's nothing. If Van hadn't forgotten about daylight-saving time he would have been on a train for New York when the murder was committed."

"This is a most interesting case. Down at Thirty-second and Main——"

"I'm interested in only one case, Mr. Latham." She rose and went to the window. "Go ahead with your work. Don't mind me."

The telephone bell rang sharply. She strode toward the desk as Latham took off the French phone.

"Hello," he said.

Alice stood tense beside him.

"Oh, hello, Bill," he said, and looked up at her and shook his head.

Her tired shoulders sagged as she walked back to the window and she clenched her fists as Latham

and a man named Bill decided whom they would get to make the fourth in their Sunday golf game.

Finally Latham replaced the phone.

"Wasn't him," he said.

"So I gathered."

Five minutes passed. Ten minutes. Half an hour. The execution was only eleven hours away.

Latham looked up from his papers. The girl still was standing by the window, looking at the sky as if searching for inspiration from the sunshine.

"Won't you sit down?" he said.

She shook her head and smiled wanly. "I'm praying," she said, simply.

Suddenly the telephone bell rang. Latham reached out, but Alice was ahead of him.

"Hello!" she said. . . .

"Yes, this is Miss Rankin. . . ."

She turned to Latham. "It's Jessie Duke!" she exclaimed.

Latham leaped to his feet.

"Yes, yes, I hear you," Alice was saying. "Apartment 4D, Number 2236 North Dollinger Place."

Latham hastily wrote down the address. His fingers were trembling.

"Yes," Alice said. "I'll start immediately. Thank you, thank you. . . . What's that? Hello! Hello!"

She quickly hung up the telephone.

"She's ready to talk!" she cried. "Let's go!"

A group of men and women were talking ex-

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citedly with a policeman on the sidewalk in front of the dingy apartment on Dollinger Place as Alice and Latham jumped out of Latham's limousine.

"Hey, where you goin'?" the policeman yelled.

"A business call," said Latham, with dignity.

"Where?" the policeman insisted.

"I fail to see that it is any concern of yours," Latham declared.

"Apartment 4D," Alice said quickly. "Come on," she said to Latham.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, whoa there!" the policeman blocked their way. "Maybe you know somepin."

A dozen people crowded around them.

"Here is my card," said Latham.

"Oh." There was awe in the policeman's manner now. He stepped aside. "I'll go up with you, Mr. Latham."

"What's happened?" Alice demanded.

"You come too," said the policeman. "Get back, all of yuh!" he growled at the bystanders.

They climbed three flights of stairs to Apartment 4D. It consisted of two tiny rooms and a bath, cheaply furnished, but clean.

"She's gone!" Alice exclaimed.

"Yeah," the policeman agreed. "Just a little while ago two men carried her out, screamin', and put her in a car and drove away. The neighbors called me, but it was all over when I got here. Know anything about it?"

"They overheard her talking to me!" Alice de-

clared. "I thought I heard a funny noise, sort of like a scream, just before the phone was hung up." She turned to the policeman. "You've got to find her, you've got to! Right away!"

Under the lash of frantic demands from Montgomery H. Latham, the police were searching the city. Now the great criminal lawyer was alert, eager. If he found Jessie Duke it would be one more triumph. He would save a man's life—but more important than that, Montgomery H. Latham's picture would be in the papers.

Alice was waiting with him in his office. She sat beside his desk. It was now after midnight. The late editions of the afternoon papers lay on the desk. Alice glanced at the headlines, which promised an execution at 2:30 A. M.

At the first click of the bell he seized the telephone.

"Yes?" he said. There was a long silence as he listened. Alice leaned forward, taut, her clenched fists on the newspapers.

"Great!" Latham said. "I'll be right down." He jumped up.

"They've found her!" he shouted and reached for his hat and coat. "Shot in the back, beside a road out in Engledale. She's still alive—at the city hospital. They're operating. She'll live!"

Alice pointed to the telephone. "Call the Governor."

"Right!"

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He got the little hotel in Pine Lake and asked to speak to the Governor.

"Lots of noise," he said to Alice. "They must be having a wild party." He turned quickly to the phone. "Hello! Hello, Governor? . . . Oh, it's you, G. W. The Governor there? . . . When will he be back? . . . Well, listen, G. W. . . ."

He told the Lieutenant Governor about Jessie Duke.

Evidently the Lieutenant Governor answered, "Well, what of it?"

"What of it?" Latham yelled. "I want the Governor to telephone the Warden and order a stay! That's what of it! . . . How do I know it's Jessie Duke? Well, I know! I'm certain of it. . . . Yes, that's true, but, G. W., this time I've got her. . . . Hey, wait a minute!" He turned to Alice, crest-fallen. "He hung up. He said to get the Chief of Police to telephone the Governor that the Chief has positive evidence that it's Jessie Duke and that she is ready to talk."

"All right," said Alice, promptly. "Let's go find the Chief."

"But," Latham was in despair, "they don't know. There's nothing on her to identify her, and nothing in her apartment."

"Ask her who she is! Get a statement from her! My God!" she raged, "are you going to stand there and——"

"Don't you understand!" he interrupted. "She's on the operating table, under ether, and she won't be able to talk until morning! We're lost!"

"Lost!" she denied fiercely. "They don't hang innocent men, I tell you!" Her eyes fell on the headlines in the newspaper. "Liar! Liar!" she shouted. "He'll never—" she stopped suddenly.

Latham was putting on his coat. She looked at the newspaper. She read something there. Tense, like a mechanical man, holding her breath, she raised a hand to her temple and let her hand, pressing hard, slide down her face, her eyes fixed on the words she read. "I'll go to the prison," she said softly, as if she hardly dared to speak aloud. She grasped the newspaper tight.

"You can see the boy at two o'clock," the gray-haired old Warden said, kindly. "Just before he goes—er, into the yard. That won't be long."

"He's not going into the yard," she declared

The Warden shook his head doubtfully. "I wish you were right, Miss Rankin. I—I've talked a lot to that boy and, Miss Rankin, I don't believe he did it."

"Of course he didn't do it! And you're not going to hang him! Will you please let me see the court order?"

He took it out of his desk. She held the newspaper in one hand pressed against her breast and reached for the document with the other. The order commanded the Warden to hang John Van Dyke at 2:30 A. M. on Sunday, April 28th.

She nodded and returned the legal form to him.

"Thanks," she said, and relaxed in her chair. "You can't hang Jack on that order."

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He looked at it quickly, then his eyes met hers. He was irritated. This was no time for joking and he was about to tell her so, but in her eyes he saw something that stopped him.

"Why not?" he asked, scanning the document with its legal seal and three signatures.

"You are ordered to execute him at 2:30 A. M."

"Yes."

"You can't execute him at two o'clock—nor at three o'clock?"

"No, of course not. Half-past two is the time."

She unfolded the newspaper. She pointed to a box on the front page. She read the headline to him, "Set Your Watches Forward Before You Go to Bed."

She glanced quickly at the Warden's puzzled face and resumed reading aloud: "By act of Legislature, Daylight Saving Time officially goes into effect at two o'clock to-morrow morning. One hour is dropped out of the twenty-four, so to-morrow legally is only twenty-three hours long. The lost hour will be picked up when Standard Time is restored in September."

The Warden seized the paper and read the item.

"I don't get you," he said.

"There is no 2:30 A. M. this morning. The state orders you to set your clock ahead one hour at 2 A. M. Two o'clock legally becomes three o'clock. An hour is lost—utterly lost."

"But—why—it can't be possible that——"

"The same authority that commands you to

hang Jack at 2:30 has legally wiped out that hour. There is no such time in this state. Understand?"

"I think I see what you mean," he guessed vaguely. "But—" He picked up the court order and read it carefully. Then he reached for the newspaper. He read the item again and he scratched his head. He muttered to himself, confused.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "I hope you're right! But—but it doesn't seem reasonable, somehow. I guess I better phone the Attorney General."

"You can get his opinion to-morrow. It's up to you to use your own judgment. You think Jack is innocent, don't you? Well, you can't legally hang him to-night."

"I don't want to do anything I oughtn't to," he said cautiously. "I'll call the Attorney General."

The Attorney General, roused from a sound sleep, listened to the Warden's problem, then gave his opinion.

"All right, sir," said the Warden, despairingly, and hung up the receiver. He turned to Alice. "He says it's nonsense and for me to go ahead with the execution at 2:30 A. M., Standard Time."

"It's not nonsense! You've got to wait for a new court order!"

She looked up. Latham had just opened the door and, before he entered the office, was assuring the newspaper men, waiting outside, that he was moving heaven and earth. He came in and closed the door.

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"Not a chance," he lamented. "She can't talk for hours."

"Listen to me!" Alice ordered.

She told him of her discovery.

"Great!" he exclaimed. "Wonderful!" he rubbed the palms of his hands together and looked questioningly at the Warden. "That ought to settle it, don't you think?"

"The Attorney General says to go ahead," the Warden said.

Latham's face fell. "You don't mean that you will go ahead—illegally?"

"What else can I do?"

"Well," Latham pondered. "The Attorney General knows his law. If he says so——"

"To hell with the Attorney General!" Alice raged, and pointed to the telephone. "Get the Governor!"

The Governor was called to the telephone at Pine Lake. Latham began to explain the situation. The Governor interrupted.

"You can too, be bothered," Latham yelled. . . . "I say the execution cannot legally take place until the court issues another order. You have got to grant a stay. Hear me?"

Latham turned to Alice. "There's a lot of noise there," he said. "I can't make him understand." He turned back to the telephone. "I'll tell you again, Governor. It's this way. . . ." He sighed. "He doesn't get it," he said. "He says to let the Attorney General decide."

"Let me talk to him!" Alice seized the tele-

phone. Her voice was crisp and sharp: "Governor, you signed a Daylight Saving Bill that abolishes one hour to-day. In that hour Jack Van Dyke is sentenced to hang. If you do not stop the execution you will have allowed an innocent man to be murdered! To-morrow morning Jessie Duke will make a statement that will clear Jack. And you will be run out of the state because I am going to tell the newspapers—What's that?" She turned to the Warden. "The Governor wants to speak to you," she said.

The Warden flung open the door of his office. Close behind him was Alice, followed by Latham.

"The Governor has granted a stay, boys!" the Warden announced.

The reporters rushed toward him, asking questions furiously.

Alice dragged him by the hand. "Come quick!" she ordered. She spoke to the reporters: "Mr. Latham will tell you all about it." She dragged the Warden toward the doors that led to the cell block.

"Well, boys," Latham began, "I happened to get an idea...."

The iron doors behind her, Alice ran down the corridor toward the cells of the condemned.

"It's all right, honey," she cried. "It's all right. Didn't I tell you?"

FAIR AND STORMY

By

Hugh MacNair Kahler

AT THE noon recess, on his way to dinner, Harvey Warren stopped to look up at the statue of Justice over the brick courthouse. He saw the sword and the balance, but his eyes focused grimly on the blindfold.

They were taking Eddie Ritter across the square to his dinner in the jail—the last meal, Warren knew, that Eddie would have to eat there. Eddie looked as if he knew this, too. He grinned cheerfully at Warren, as if to show that he didn't bear malice against the county prosecutor for trying to send him to the chair. All through the trial he had worn just that same grin, good-humored, confident, faintly amused.

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There was reason for it, Harvey Warren thought, as he moved away toward the Canastego House. With that bandage over her eyes Justice wasn't dangerous to a murderer who could hire Sidney Horvine to defend him, and who was tried before a jury of hill farmers with a hill-bred village lawyer as prosecutor. Eddie Ritter would surely be acquitted.

In the dining-room at the Canastego House the jury had a long table to themselves, at the back of the big, ugly room. When Warren came in they were looking out of the windows behind their table and he heard one of them declaring excitedly that it was certainly going to rain before sundown.

Sidney Horvine, sitting with the witnesses for the defense, must have heard that prophecy too. His little, cunning eyes twinkled impudently at Warren. The prosecutor nodded and crossed to sit beside Uncle Jimmy Dyke.

"Looks like rain, sure's you're born," said Uncle Jimmy. He sounded excited about it. Harvey Warren didn't exactly blame him. Rain, after six weeks of drought, meant a lot to Uncle Jimmy—more than a murder trial, certainly, that was bound to end in acquittal. Most of the jury were farmers too. You couldn't blame them for being fooled by the air-tight kind of perjury that an artist like Sidney Horvine put before them, any more than for getting excited about the prospect of rain on their thirsty little fields.

It was Harvey Warren's business to break down that carefully rehearsed structure of lies. If Eddie

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Ritter went free, to go serenely back to his trade of murder, it would be Harvey Warren's fault, not the jury's. It would be Harvey Warren's fault when another decent man like poor old Jerry Blaine died before Eddie's gun. It was Harvey Warren's fault if the hand of Justice weakened on its sword.

"Ritter'll get off," he said, more to himself than to Uncle Jimmy.

"Bound to," said Uncle Jimmy. "Couldn't 've been him that shot Jerry. Proved over and over that he was down to New York when it happened." His voice quickened. "Rain, sure as——"

"Can't you see that it's nothing but perjury?" Warren spoke with a sudden heat of anger, less toward Uncle Jimmy than for the jurymen who would reason exactly as Uncle Jimmy did. "Fraser and Blunt saw Ritter come out of the bank. They both identify him positively. You've known them all their lives; you know they wouldn't swear away a man's life on a guess, but you'll believe these strangers——"

"Bound to," Uncle Jimmy insisted. "Couldn't be lying—not so many of 'em. One man might make up a likely lie and stick to it without getting tangled up, but not six-seven men. No, sir. Fraser and Blunt made a mistake, that's all. They picked out the wrong man from those rogues' gall'ry pictures."

Horvine came over to the table. Warren knew that it was part of his technique to make a show of friendly sportsmanship where the jury would see

it. He knew they were watching, that if he rebuffed Horvine's affable approach there would be less chance than ever of tearing that bandage away from the eyes of Justice.

"Well, we ought to get through this afternoon," said Horvine genially. Warren knew what he meant. Only a quick acquittal could finish the case before to-morrow. Horvine was rubbing it in, trying to prod him into a display of anger. Horvine knew that an angry prosecutor always prejudiced a jury against himself.

"Jury'll get through as quick's they can," said Uncle Jimmy. "They'll be looking for rain before sundown."

Horvine chuckled. Warren knew what he was laughing at, but Uncle Jimmy didn't. People like Uncle Jimmy were slow to suspect it when somebody ridiculed them.

"Everybody up this way seems to be a weather prophet," Horvine said.

"Got to be," said Uncle Jimmy. "Weather makes us or breaks us. It's our reg'lar business, weather is."

"That's so." Horvine sounded respectful. His little eyes, though, jeered at Harvey Warren. "I suppose it does matter a lot more to you people than it does to us." He grinned at Warren. "I guess even a lawyer like Warren could put it all over me—in a weather-guessing contest."

Warren nodded, as if he hadn't felt the thrust. Horvine went jauntily back to join his allies. Uncle Jimmy wagged his head admiringly.

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"Smart," he said. "No need for you to feel bad, Harve, getting licked by him. It's a good thing for you, if you look at it right. Ought to learn a lot, being up against a smart man like him."

Harvey Warren's big hand closed slowly so that the skin showed dully white at the knuckles.

"I guess I have learned something, Uncle Jimmy," he said. "You're right about Horvine. He's so smart that he's taught me a lot about my job—without even trying to do it."

He went out. A little chorus of snickering laughter came to him as he passed Horvine's table, but this time it didn't seem to sting.

Eddie Ritter had made a good witness for himself. All through Warren's cross-examination he had grinned amiably, looking and speaking exactly like that "big, good-natured, happy-go-lucky boy," of whom Sid Horvine had spoken so often.

The jurymen were restless. They had heard it all over and over, word for word as Eddie told it, and the clouds beyond the westward windows were promisingly black.

"Just one more question, Ritter." The jury brightened to attention. Ritter straightened and his grin became more cheerful than ever.

"It is a simple question, but I warn you solemnly to take care how you answer it, because your life depends on answering it right. If you did not spend the evening of April twenty-second at Coney Island, then you and your witnesses have all sworn falsely and the whole structure of your defense

falls to the ground. If you were there, on that night, you can tell the jury whether or not it was raining. Tell them, Ritter. We country people are always interested in weather. Tell them——”

He saw the sudden sweat on Ritter's face, saw the eyes narrow and go murderous with hate and fear.

“It was——” Ritter stopped.

“Take care,” said Warren gently.

“Clear.” Ritter's voice was flat and harsh. “No——it was raining.” His trapped eyes darted at the jury box. “No, it was——”

Horvine was on his feet, sputtering incoherent objections, but the lean, sun-bitten faces in the jury box were turned soberly toward Ritter, and it seemed to Harvey Warren, as he watched them, that overhead the stone figure of Justice had loosened the blindfold at last, and that the carved fingers were closing slowly on the hilt of the great, stern sword.

RED WINE

By
L. G. Blochman

A RAUCOUS toot from the whistle of the yellow funneled K.P.M. steamer echoed from the jungle covered headlands to arouse Heer Controleur Koert from his afternoon nap. Heer Koert did not swear; the day was too hot for any such exertion as swearing. He opened one eye and peered through the haze of his mosquito netting. Below his veranda lay a collection of glaring tin roofed sheds, whitewashed Chinese shops, and *attap* huts clinging to the green edge of the low river bank.

Some distance offshore, beyond the muddy swirl made by the river as it pushed brown fingers into the unruffled blue of the sea, the mail steamer was

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smoking impatiently, the only connection between Tanjong Samar and civilization. And since Heer Koert was the official representative of civilization in Tanjong Samar, he opened the other eye.

He watched the swarm of *praus* and *sampans* streaking for the ship, and estimated that he would have half an hour before being forced to make any further movement. In half an hour he would arise, dash tepid water on himself from a Java bath jar, drink a cup of coffee and button his white duck jacket high about his neck. Thus he would be fit to sit at his desk and properly receive the official communications and two weeks' accumulations of the *Bataviasch Nieuwsblad* which his dusky skinned *aspirant-controleur* would bring ashore.

The *controleur's* leisurely routine was somewhat rushed, however, when he saw that the first boat ashore did not debark his slow moving assistant, but a brisk walking white man he had never seen before. The stranger made such a rapid climb to the *controleur's* bungalow that Heer Koert had barely time to make himself dignified before there was a knock on the screen door of the veranda. He waddled ponderously to answer.

A man in a pongee suit and white topee stood there, wiping his perspiring face with a silk handkerchief. He was a well fed appearing man whose movements were good natured and deliberate. His frank smile caused deep dimples to dot either side of a face that gave an impression of virile intelligence—an impression somehow strengthened

by the droop of his right eyelid over a vaguely pale eye. The alert vitality of the good eye was penetrating enough for two.

"Are you Mr. Koert?" asked the man in the pongee suit. "My name is Paul Vernier. The governor-general promised me your coöperation. Has he written you?"

"You are here before the mail," said the *contrôleur*. "But you have my coöperation anyhow. Won't you sit down please?"

"I'll come right to the point," said Vernier, sinking into a high, fan backed Bilibid chair. "I'm looking for a killer."

"Dayaks, maybe?" said the rotund *contrôleur*. "You must go far up the river to find them. And they are not killing so much any more. Instead of letting them hunt new heads for marriage ceremonies, we are persuading them to use old heads——"

"Dayaks don't interest me," said Vernier. "I'm looking for an American—an American murderer named Jerome Steeks. I've traced him to Tanjong Samar."

Koert clapped his hands and shouted something in Malay, which was answered by a grunt in another room.

"I am offering you coffee," he explained. "This is coffee time. Later is gin time. Where is your baggage?"

"I have all the baggage I need in my inside pocket—extradition papers for Jerome Steeks, approved by the governor-general in Batavia. I'll

pick up Steeks as soon as you tell me where he is, and I'll take him aboard the steamer before she sails."

"You can't do that," said the *controleur* simply.

"Why not? I'm positive Jerome Steeks is in Tanjong Samar."

"There is nobody with that name in my district."

"Naturally, he wouldn't be using his own name. But it shouldn't be so hard to locate my man in this bustling metropolis. Isn't there an American here?"

"There are three Americans." Vernier's eyebrows raised slightly as Koert continued, "All three are on the Kota Bharu rubber estate up the river. The round trip to the plantation will take two hours, not counting time for looking for the Americans. The steamer leaves in one hour. Shall I send out for your baggages?"

Vernier's gaze fixed Koert for a moment. Then his pursed lips spread into a smile.

"All right," he said. "If it won't be too much trouble."

Koert clapped his hands again and muttered more Malay. A servant appeared with a tray.

"They will get it for you," said the *controleur*. "And now we can drink our coffee."

There was no coffee pot on the tray—only cups, sugar bowl, a pitcher of hot milk and a small jug. Vernier watched Koert pour a spoonful of black essence from the jug into each cup, then add the steaming milk. The resultant liquid looked and smelled a little like coffee.

"And now," said Koert, passing a cup, "tell me about this man you want to arrest. Does he know you?"

"No."

"Good. In that case he will not suspect. You can arrest him a few hours before the next ship calls. That will save unpleasant makeshifts. We have no good jail here. You will recognize this American? You have his photograph?"

"Jerome Steeks is a very clever man," said Vernier. "He planned a perfect escape from a nearly perfect crime. There isn't a single picture or set of fingerprints of him in existence. I know him only by description; medium height, slight build, pale complexion, dark hair and small black mustache."

The *controleur* suddenly grasped his ample girth with both hands, threw back his head, opened his mouth wide and emitted loud cackling sounds. After a moment Vernier decided Heer Koert was laughing.

"You must have come to the wrong *dessa*," laughed the *controleur*. "All three men are medium height, but all are quite strong looking, clean shaven, brown as coffee by the sun, and none has dark hair."

"I told you Steeks was clever," Vernier smiled, a little wistfully. "But I'm positive he is here. He came here from Batavia six months ago."

"All three men came from Batavia six months ago, by the same boat. The estate changed hands

and the new owner wanted Americans to run it, because American planters know how to bud the trees and double the rubber yield . . . What sort of man is the murderer?"

Vernier gulped the bitterish coffee.

"Utterly ruthless," he said, "yet a polished gentleman. Strange combination. He has lived a great deal in Europe, where he was known as a connoisseur of music, women, good cooking and fine wines. I heard of him first when I was in France."

"Ah, France," said Heer Koert, looking steadfastly at Vernier's drooping eyelid. "Then it was in France that you——"

He made a vague gesture, as though afraid to touch on a delicate subject. Vernier saw the gesture and smiled.

"Yes," he said. "A piece of shrapnel. It started me on my present career, I guess. One eye isn't enough for the infantry, so they took me off the line and put me into the Intelligence. I made so many French contacts that after the Armistice I followed them up. Stayed on in Paris to study Bertillon methods with the French Sûreté. Just before I came home I remember reading of Jerome Steeks attending the annual banquet of Paris vintners, entering the usual wine tasting contest and identifying by taste as many unlabeled vintages as the oldest professional taster."

Heer Koert made clucking sounds with his tongue.

"A gourmet," he commented.

"He was rich. Nobody questioned the source of his money, which was undoubtedly—well, extra-legal. Three years ago he married a San Francisco heiress, took her to Europe, brought her back to California. Shortly after their return, Mrs. Steeks's body was found lying on the end of a little used pier, a bullet in the brain. Tire marks on the pier led to a search for the Steeks's car, which was found in the bay. Steeks was supposed to have been drowned in the plunge. A note told of a suicide pact. They had run through the heiress's fortune, lost staggering sums at Monte Carlo and decided on death rather than poverty. Although Steeks's body was never found, in view of the tides, the discovery of two empty shells in a revolver, and the fact that Mrs. Steeks's fortune was indeed dissipated, the police accepted the double suicide theory."

"And of course it was false?"

"Of course. It was a case of cold blooded murder for profit. A year later a prominent shyster lawyer got into a jam, was arrested, and in his safe cops found a letter from Steeks, written from Batavia. The lawyer had apparently been salting away the wife's missing fortune and was to notify Steeks when he could come back safely. Well, the Secretary of State asked for extradition right away, and I slid out to Batavia to pick up the trail. Clews can get pretty cold in a year, and evidence can be camouflaged. But I've got Mr. Steeks here now. With no steamer for two weeks, he can't very well get away from me."

Controleur Koert shook his head in a puzzled manner.

"I am not so sure," he said. "There is no gourmet and no polished gentleman at Kota Bharu estate. There is just Americans."

"One of them is a murderer. When can we go and pick him out, Mr. Koert?"

The *controleur* scratched himself behind the ear.

"First I must attend to the steamer," he said. "Then I will talk with you about best methods."

"In the meantime I'll walk about the town a bit," said Vernier, arising. "It's cooler now. Maybe I can learn something."

"Mr. Vernier, please don't open that screen door yet," cried Koert, rushing after the detective in a panic. "Wait."

He rolled a newspaper into a small torch, lighted it and waved the flame against the screen to cremate whatever mosquitoes had gathered on the outside waiting a chance to enter.

"Now," he said. "Go. And shut the door quickly. In an hour and a half come back. We will have gin *pahits* and discuss methods."

The *controleur* persuaded Paul Vernier to wait until next morning before starting his man hunt. The sun glinted with hard brilliance on the coffee colored river when the two men—Koert in whites, Vernier in khaki—walked down to the shore. They threaded their way among carved, high stemmed *praus*, drawn up on the beach, with red and blue demons grinning from their leaning masts. The

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two white men crawled under the palm thatched canopy shading the middle of a long narrow *sampan*. Paddles dug into the brown water, churning the current. The craft swung upstream.

The *sampan* slid between low banks of mangrove and nipa palms, behind which arose mountains of verdure, cliffs of tangled palms and creepers, slashed by the broad fresh green blades of plantains, flecked by the white puffs of ripe tree cotton, the yellow of cannas and the flame of *lantana*.

Four naked mahogany torsos glistened as four paddles swung in unison. The steersman aft of the canopy chanted.

After a few minutes on the river Vernier drew Koert's attention to another *sampan* following them, stroke for stroke.

"Yes," said Koert. "That is your baggages. I had them sent by another *sampan* because we are already crowded in this one."

"But I don't need baggage," said Vernier. "I won't have to stay at the plantation. I'll pick my man and come back to stay with you—if you don't mind."

"I would be more than pleased. But I am afraid you will have to stay longer. I know the three Americans. None of them fits your description. You will have to study them closer. The governor-general said I should help you, so I sent word ahead that we would come for *makan* at noon today and that you might want to stay on for a few days to see how rubber is made."

The round faced detective's dimples appeared.

"I wouldn't like to do that—accept a man's hospitality and then clamp the bracelets on him. If I find I have to stay there to complete my identification, I'll tell them so right out. Not likely that my man will escape from this place. That way it will make it an open battle of wits, and I'll feel better about staying with the men."

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed the *controleur*. "You can't do that. I have already said you were a stockholder and for that reason wished to stay on the plantation. You can not contradict the *controleur*."

Vernier's dimples disappeared.

"Can't you say you misunderstood me?" he inquired.

"Should the governor-general hear I was misunderstanding people, I might not get my promotion to be sub-resident in Java. Besides, it will be easier for you to work quietly like I plan."

"Well, all right. We'll try it for awhile," said Vernier soberly. A pucker grew between his eyebrows.

A rickety little pier, two tin roofed sheds and a clearing of the jungle to make way for the symmetrical rows of *hevea* trees marked the place where the Kota Bharu rubber plantation reached the river. From the river it was a five-minute walk to the large bungalow, raised on piles, which served as quarters for the white plantation managers.

The three managers puzzled Vernier as they were introduced—Prale, Wilmerding and Doran.

The *controleur* had been right. There was nothing of a cultured *bon vivant* among these rough and ready Americans, and all were light. Prale was a bland looking, sandy haired fellow with a smart Aleck twist to the corners of his mouth and a turned up nose. Wilmerding was blond, almost tow headed, with a vigorous handshake. Doran, keen eyed and restless, had light reddish hair. Which one of the trio was the black haired Jerome Steeks? None of them, Vernier would have said, had he not definite information that the murderer was here. One of them *must* be Steeks.

"Hope you don't object to *rystaffel*," said Doran as they filed into a darkened room for lunch. "That's all our cook ever gives us for noon."

"From what I had of it in Java," said Vernier, "I rather like it."

"I don't," said Wilmerding. "*Rystaffel's* enough to give dyspepsia to a herd of buffaloes."

Whatever the reaction of buffaloes to the national dish of the Dutch colonial in the Indies, Wilmerding was apparently not afraid of dyspepsia for himself. He heaped his plate high with rice and proceeded to decorate it with all the accessories which two servants brought to the table: curried eggs, fried bananas, onions, chutneys, shredded cocoanut, tiny red dried fish, peppers and various unidentified spiced meats and vegetables. Vernier watched Wilmerding mix the conglomeration in approved Dutch East Indies style. Wilmerding caught Vernier's eye, guessed his judgment on the score of inconsistency, and said——

"Well, we have to eat something."

"*Rystaffel's* not bad with a glass of beer," said Vernier.

"We never have any real cold beer out here," Wilmerding complained. "No ice. And warm beer is nasty."

Vernier studied Wilmerding a moment. He was attacking his *rystaffel* with as much gusto as his two companions, but for a flash, Vernier thought he had detected a styled movement on the lifting of a fork. Perhaps not, inasmuch as Wilmerding wiped his mouth with the back of his hand after taking a draft of beer. Still——

"I ran across some pretty good wine down in Batavia and Sourabaya. Why don't you fellows get some of it sent up?" Vernier suggested.

"Never learned to drink wine," said Wilmerding. "We got plebeian tastes. Just beer—and a little gin or Scotch at night. Prale over there talks a lot about the wine he drank, but if you ask me, he'd a lot rather have an ice cream soda. A lot of us would, I guess."

He ran his fingers through his blond hair, thoughtfully sipped some beer, then went after his rice with renewed vigor.

Talk ranged from baseball back in the States to the classic argument as to which is worse, mosquitoes or citronella oil; the amours of the contract Javanese laborers and reports of a head hunting expedition by Dayaks in a neighboring district occupied some of the conversation. It wasn't until

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an amazing amount of rice had been consumed, however, that Vernier saw his first indication as to which of the three might be the cultured murderer. The detective pricked up his ears when Wilmerding suggested that Doran give him some music.

"Music?" echoed Vernier.

"Yeh. Doran plays," said Prale. "He plays a mean phonograph."

Yes, the phonograph was his, Doran admitted. What would Mr. Vernier like to hear? Probably nothing, because it was damned hard to keep up a decent repertoire out there in Borneo, where the new records had to be shipped in and half the time arrived broken.

"May I look?" said Vernier.

He slid back the disks, one after the other, expecting to find recordings of operas, symphonies and other more serious compositions—probably French composers dominating. He found only jazz numbers, out-of-date sentimental ballads, Irving Berlin, pre-Gershwin dance music. No trained, cosmopolitan taste here.

"Play anything," he said.

The phonograph squealed, sang and strummed away. Wilmerding sat smoking a pipe with Heer Koert. Prale walked to the edge of the veranda and looked through the screen toward the river. Doran was sorting over his precious records. Vernier walked slowly about the room, taking in details with his one alert eye. He stopped in front of a bookcase and began reading the titles.

"Hello," he said. "Who owns the French books?"

"They were here when we came," said Wilmerding. "There was a French planter on the estate before us. He left the books."

"Anybody here read them?" Vernier inquired, taking down a volume bound in yellow paper covers.

"Prale practically invented the French language," said Doran. "Just ask him."

Vernier was holding the French book close to his face, slowly turning pages. "I studied French," he said, as if to himself. Then, watching the room over the top of his book, he said, as though reading, "*Il y a un meurtrier dans cette maison.*"

He paused, watching for a reaction to his announcement in French that there was a murderer in the house. He was disappointed. Prale looked stupidly sheepish as the others overwhelmed him with banter.

"What's it all about, Prale?" demanded Wilmerding.

"Translate for us," ordered Doran.

"Why, it's all about houses," said Prale. "*Maison*—that's French for house."

When the laughter had subsided, Heer Controleur Koert arose and mopped his ruddy face.

"You will excuse me, I have to return to the *dessá* for important official business," he said, with as much equanimity as if every one present did not know that the important business was his

daily *siesta*. "And you, Mr. Vernier? Are you going to pay a visit of some days to this estate?"

"If I'm not in the way," said Vernier.

The drooping lid of his sightless eye quivered just a trifle.

"Plenty of room," said Wilmerding.

"Even if there wasn't, we'd make room by putting Doran out to sleep with the mosquitoes," said Prale.

"Which would spare me from listening to Prale's wisecracks," countered Doran.

"I would like very much to have a chance to see how you fellows get a dozen golf balls and a set of balloon tires out of a tree," said Vernier. "But I warn you—" he paused and looked at Koert—"I warn you that you'll have me prowling all over the place, asking questions like a woman at a ball game. I'm curious—about all sorts of things."

He worked his curiosity overtime during the next few days. He prowled and asked questions at all hours. He would follow Prale down the estate in the misty dawn at tapping time, listening as he offered profane suggestions, half English, half broken Malay, to the Javanese who were shaving the diagonal scars on the trunks of the *hevea* trees so that the milky latex would ooze out into grooves, through a spigot into tiny porcelain cups. After the sun had become hot enough to stop the flow of sap he would make the rounds with Wilmerding, watching Javanese women in gay *sarongs*

collecting latex in buffalo drawn tank carts. Then he would stand, where Doran, at the chemical shack, received the latex, pouring it into vats to be coagulated into rubber.

But in three days he got nowhere. He still believed that one of the planters was Jerome Steeks. And he still did not know whether it was Prale, Doran, or Wilmerding. One thing he did know for certain: Steeks's hair had changed color in the last eighteen months. The dark murderer of San Francisco had become a blond. Hydrogen peroxide or some other bleaching agent must have been in use here. In use constantly, too, because for three days Vernier had looked closely to find one head of hair that was darker at the roots. Vain search. The new growth was apparently being bleached as fast as it came out. This might be a clew.

The following day, when the three planters had gone out into the steamy morning, Vernier remained at the bungalow, pleading a headache. He lay on his springless tropical bed until he no longer heard the servants stirring about. Then he arose, went directly to Prale's room and started systematically to examine every corner of it. He ran hurriedly through a chest of drawers, and a steamer trunk green with the quick mold of the tropics. He had little expectation that a man as clever as Jerome Steeks would leave telltale papers around, but he hoped to find that bleaching agent. As a matter of fact, he found nothing but clothes, a photograph of an old woman in a moldy

leather case, a catalog from a Chicago mail order house——

He repeated the procedure in Wilmerding's room. As he was opening a trunk he thought he heard steps outside the door. He arose quickly, listened, looked out. He saw no one. He returned to his task; again fruitless. Doran's room was equally devoid of evidence.

But Doran was in the chemical shack most of the day! Just the place to hide a bleach and a little henna dye. A bottle more or less among the other chemicals would not be noticed. So Vernier went out to do a little noticing. He asked questions of Doran, who was busy with the latex. He picked up bottles and tapped metal drums. Doran gave a satisfactory explanation for everything. Another blind clew.

Prale? Wilmerding? Doran? He shut himself up alone that afternoon to reflect, to work out some plan of attack. He was so wrapped in thought that he was late for dinner. An animated conversation was in progress before he reached the table, but it stopped suddenly as he appeared in the doorway. As he sat down, conversation was resumed on trivial matters, obviously forced in an effort by the planters to cover up a change of subject. Vernier knew they had been talking about him.

After dinner there was a poker game. The four men sat about a table on the veranda. Perspiration glistened on faces and naked arms, golden in the lamplight.

A cloud of insects buzzed and flickered about

the lamp, one occasionally diving into the flame with an odorous sizzle, sometimes falling among the cards in a wing beating frenzy. Vernier was unusually quiet. He was studying his three opponents.

Jerome Steeks had been somewhat of a gambler. He might betray himself at the game. One of the three planters did, in fact, display considerable more card sense than the others—Prale. Luck was against him, however, and the chips piled up in front of Vernier. The trio were not good sports about losing, either. At least, Vernier attributed a certain tensivity in the hot atmosphere to his consistent winnings. Conversation seemed strained, to-night, and what little talk there was was rarely directed at him.

Finally, when he had raked in a jack pot with four sixes over Prale's ace full, Doran tossed his cards to the center of the table and cleared his throat.

"Say, Vernier," he began, looking the detective full in the face. "Just exactly what are you doing in Borneo, anyhow?"

"I thought Koert explained," said Vernier. "I'm——"

"We mean the real reason," said Wilmerding. "Of course, the stockholder story is out, because there aren't any stockholders in Kota Bharu rubber. The whole estate belongs to one man. I know that for certain."

Vernier laughed. It was a genuine laugh, for although he felt the situation rapidly growing more

uneasy, he could appreciate the joke he had played on himself by accepting the *controleur's* suggestion to act the rôle of stockholder.

"Do you boys think I'm out here to sell you gold bricks or something?" he said genially.

His joviality was not reflected by the three planters. There was an embarrassed silence for several seconds. Then Prale said with a drawl——

"What kind of gold bricks were you looking for in my room this morning?"

Again a leaden moment of silence. All eyes were fixed on Vernier. The detective held the deck of cards between his hands and was ruffling the edge of the pack with his thumb. It made a sharp crackling noise, repeated several times as he scanned the three faces around the lamp. He was thinking about the footsteps he had heard while he was in Wilmerding's room that morning. A spying servant, seeking to ingratiate himself by bearing tales to his employer?

"In your room?"

"Yes," said Wilmerding. "We understand you did a little prospecting to-day—to cure your headache."

"I don't like this business—your coming here lying to us, Vernier," put in Doran. "How do we know what crooked game you're up to? You're probably a spy of some kind."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"He's not ridiculous." It was Wilmerding speaking. "We're living on the frayed edge of civilization here. We've got to look out for our-

selves. We've got a perfect right to be suspicious of strangers. There's nothing ridiculous in a man protecting himself against potential enemies."

"How did you just happen to come to Tanjong Samar, which most people never heard of?" demanded Prale. "Why did you pick Kota Bharu estate out of the hundreds of rubber plantations in the East Indies?"

Vernier was still ruffling the pack of cards with his thumb. The three men about the table looked at him in ominous silence. They were serious, these faces that perspired in the lamplight; suspicious, challenging and perhaps just a bit contemptuous. Vernier dropped the cards to the table carelessly. A *gecko* in some dark corner of the veranda uttered a series of explosive cries that sounded uncannily like human words. Insects continued their monotonous buzzing about the lamp. Vernier leaned forward easily on his elbows.

"I'll tell you why I came to Tanjong Samar," he said at last. "I came here to arrest a murderer."

There was a little movement by each of the three planters. Surprise, perhaps. Resentment——

"I'll be quite frank with you boys," Vernier continued. "I told the *controleur* he'd better pass me off as a stockholder until I found out which one of you three was the man I wanted. I had definite information that the murderer was on the Kota Bharu rubber estate."

Vernier's smile again flashed, and his one eye shone so with frankness that the planters leaned

back in their chairs. The tension was eased for a moment.

"I'll bet Doran is the guy you're after," said Prale.

"If you stick around long enough, you can pick me up for killing Prale. I feel it coming on," said Doran.

"What's the murderer's name?" asked Wilmerding.

"Jerome Steeks."

Vernier's keen glance shifted from one face to another, but he detected not so much as the flicker of an eyelash.

"Never heard of him."

"Sounds like a vegetable to me."

"Which one of us is he?"

Vernier leisurely lighted a cigarette over the lamp chimney before he replied.

"None of you," he said. "I hadn't been here long before I decided that the tip I had was wrong. Jerome Steeks had dark hair. You men are all naturally light—nothing phony about your wigs. So I'm going to go back to Java on the next K.P.M. steamer. Then home. I kick myself, though, for having had you all under false suspicion, even if it wasn't my fault. To put myself right, to show there's no ill will on my part, I want to throw a party for you boys. We'll make it on steamer day, and you can declare a holiday, because I know the captain of the *Van Laar* is a real epicure. He has a fine cellar aboard—specializes in Chambertin—and has a great cook. I'll

have him lend me the cook and a few rare old bottles for the occasion. You're invited to take a rest from *rystaffel* and have a real feed. How about it?"

There was no immediate response to the invitation. The planters seemed a little bit wary. Wilmerding spoke first.

"Sure, we'll eat your chow," he said.

"Fine," said Vernier. "I'll promise you a banquet you won't forget. How would boar with Madeira and mushroom sauce do for the roast? I'll furnish the wine sauce if there's boar to be had around here. I'll shoot one myself if some one will lend me a gun."

"I'll shoot you a pig," said Doran. "I don't like strangers using my gun."

Next morning Vernier went down the river to Tanjong Samar and called on the *controleur*.

"Mr. Koert," he said, "when does the East Borneo steamer leave Batavia?"

The *controleur* studied red lines on a wall map and consulted books.

"Is there any way for me to get through a communication to the ship before she leaves Java?" said Vernier, while Koert turned pages.

The *controleur* stroked his two chins a moment before replying.

"There is wireless at Balik Papan," he said. "For twenty-five guilders I can get an *Orang Laut* to paddle up the coast to Balik Papan to the wireless station. He would get there in time. Why?"

"I want the U. S. consul in Batavia to get some things on that boat for me. The consul knows a good cellar in Batavia. I want him to get me some Chambertin of the same vintage he produced when I was there. And I'll want other wines, and a cook. He can get me a cook from the Hôtel des Indes and put him on the boat, too, with ingredients for a menu I'm going to indicate. And ice. We must have ice——"

He sat down and began drafting his message.

"Very good," said the *controleur*. "If you will give me the twenty-five guilders, and the price of the message, I will see it goes at once. And in the meantime I am glad you are here. If you had not come, I should have gone after you this afternoon. You must stay with me until your steamer comes."

"Why so?"

"Because your life is no longer safe on the plantation."

"What makes you think so?"

"I know. I hear from natives. Servants talk. Talk travels. In the end, it always reaches me. You told the planters at Kota Bharu of your mission——"

"I protected you. The governor-general will never know anything derogatory."

"But your man will certainly kill you before steamer day."

"Oh, no," said Vernier, smiling. "We're all good friends now. I'm giving this dinner to show there's no hard feelings. Besides, I must go back

to the estate. Everything depends upon my being there."

"Well, suit yourself; but remember I warned you."

"I consider myself warned. And in the meantime hurry that SOS for food, wine, and ice. You're invited, of course."

Cordial relations were apparently reestablished when Vernier returned to the rubber estate. The three planters gave no outward evidence that they had not accepted Vernier's profession of good faith, yet the detective sensed an undercurrent of suspicion. He had an idea one of the trio was fomenting ill feelings, or at least keeping it alive, for his own private ends. And for that reason Vernier slept lightly and kept his loaded automatic under his "Dutch Wife"—the cylindrical bolster found beneath every mosquito netting in the East Indies, used as an aid to ventilation of the body and to reduce perspiration during sleep.

During the entire week that preceded the arrival of the K.P.M. steamer, Vernier acted as enthusiastic press agent for his farewell dinner. He outlined his menu and told of the wines he would serve with each course—particularly the Chambertin, king of red Burgundies, robust, fragrant, heady, Napoleon's favorite wine—

"Any Chambertin is fine," Vernier would tell the planters, "but 1911 Chambertin is beyond comparison. It is the superlative in wine. Bur-

gundy produced real nectar that year. You'll see."

Three days before the arrival of the steamer the matter of boar again came up. All three planters decided to go shooting.

"Come with us," said Prale to Vernier.

"I haven't a gun," said Vernier, looking at Doran.

Doran looked away and did not reply.

"I have two rifles," said Wilmerding. "You can take one."

At the last minute, however, Wilmerding found that the packing of smoked crêpe for shipment on the next boat was not going rapidly enough. He decided to stay on the estate to push the coolies a bit.

Prale and Doran accompanied Vernier into the jungle beyond the limits of the plantation. Vernier noticed casually that he was the only one wearing a white topee. The other two wore khaki sun helmets.

"We won't have to go far," said Prale. "Sometimes they come right down in the trees. Just keep plugging straight ahead."

That was the plan. Vernier was to keep on straight ahead, while Prale and Doran were to oblique to the right and left. Several Malays were out in front.

As a matter of fact, as soon as the two men were out of sight in the chest high thicket, Vernier stopped walking. He wanted those two men ahead

of him, not behind. Jerome Steeks was a ruthless person——

The detective took off his white topee and perched it atop a *lantana* bush. Then he walked several paces away and squatted down in the damp growth, his rifle between his knees. They could not possibly see him there, but they could see his sun helmet—a flash of white in the dense greenery.

For twenty minutes he waited, whisking away flies and insects. Then he heard a shot, followed by two more, a fourth shot, and his sun helmet leaped spinning into the air, struck a tree, bounded to the ground at his feet. Jerome Steeks could shoot, too. Which was he? Vernier picked up the helmet. Did the shot come from the left—Prale? or the right—Doran? He turned the helmet in the direction it had been facing atop the bush. He looked at the holes. Then he looked again. The shot had come from neither left nor right. It had come from behind. One of the pair had succeeded in circling around behind him, despite his precautions. But which one?

Putting on his helmet he started back toward the estate. He hoped to cross the trail of the man who had fired from behind. But he was disappointed. He reached the bungalow without meeting any one. It was half an hour later that Prale and Doran came back, with their Malays carrying the dead pig.

There was no more stray shooting before steamer day, and when the yellow funneled steamer again hove-to off the river mouth, Vernier was still in the dark as to who fired the shot.

RED WINE

The ship arrived one gray, sweltering afternoon, and the *controleur* got the skipper to lay over until nearly midnight, instead of making the usual hurried call. He could be in Balik Papan by dawn, anyhow.

The cook imported from Batavia came ashore in a *sampan* loaded with crates, boxes and a huge cake of ice wrapped in burlap. He repaired immediately to the bungalow of Heer Koert where he shooed his Chinese predecessor into a corner and began to exercise his art. In view of the *controleur's* superior kitchen, and the time that would have been lost by transporting the supplies up the river, the three planters had agreed to come down to the *desa*.

In deference to Dutch colonial custom, the dinner was preceded by a few rounds of gin *pahits* on the veranda. Vernier proudly produced a menu written in French, which he passed around, watching the expression on the faces of the three Americans as they read:

FOIE GRAS AU PORTO
HOMARD À L'ARMORICAINE
TRUFFES SOUS LA CENDRE
SANGLIER À LA MADÈRE

POMMES SOUFFLÉES

ZABAGLIONE

PETITS FOURS . . . ROQUEFORT

DEMI-TASSE

MONTRACHET 1904 CHAMBERTIN-CRÉ-
SIGNY 1911 CHAMPAGNE IRROY 1919

The eyes of the Dutch *controleur* and the steamship captain, who also was a guest, grew large and bright as they scanned the menu. Those of the three Americans did not show a flicker of comprehension.

The planters smacked their lips over the goose liver in port wine jelly, however, and breathed noisily in unison—Ah-h-h—when the lobster appeared, steaming in its savory fumes of white wine, brandy, essence of tomatoes.

Paul Vernier, as he presided over the table, glittering with the crystal ware and cutlery from Batavia, seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself. At times he could be as boisterous as the three Americans. Yet when he mentioned his wines, he spoke reverently in low tones.

"This Montrachet," he said, as he poured the fragrant golden wine that accompanied the lobster, "beats any other white wine in the world. Can't compete with Chambertin, of course, but in 1904 it was as good as white Burgundy ever was or will be."

The planters approved profanely. There was plenty of white wine, so they drank plenty. And Montrachet is a heady wine. . . . They probably did not fully appreciate the truffles. Each truffle had been imbedded in a potato and baked in live coals. One had only to peel off the charred potato to find the truffle in all its succulence. . . .

Then came the boar, bathed in its mauve wine sauce, studded with mushrooms, exhaling a glorious aroma.

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"And now," announced Vernier, "the king of wines. There never was a better wine than Chambertin, and there never was a better Chambertin than 1911. Look!"

Carefully cradled in a special basket with a handle at one end, the bottle was passed around. Vernier called attention to the cobwebs on the bottle. Then he poured a little in his own glass, holding it up to be admired.

"Look at that color!" he said. "Rubies. Clear, leaping flame. The fire of a thousand sunsets. And the bouquet! Just have a whiff of it. Sheer poetry! That's wine for you—Chambertin!"

He held out the glass to the nostrils of each of the guests, watching them as they breathed the spirituous fragrance.

"And now, pass me your large wine glasses, please. Thanks."

Scarcely moving the bottle, he poured each glass three-fourths full. His one keen eye darted quick glances about the table. Then he suddenly plunged a spoon into a dish of cracked ice and began to tinkle the crystal chunks into each glass of red wine.

Wilmerding instantly half rose from his chair directly opposite, his mouth open as though he had witnessed something horrible.

"My God, man! Don't put ice in that Chambertin!" he said in low, shocked tones.

Vernier dropped the spoon, made a swipe for his pocket and lunged across the table before

Wilmerding could sit down again. There was a metallic click, a grunt—and a pair of handcuffs glistened around Wilmerding's wrists.

Straightening up, Vernier said quietly——
 "Jerome Steeks!"

The room was immediately in an uproar. The diners were on their feet shouting, gesticulating. The *controleur* was yelling in Dutch at the steamship captain who was nodding his head furiously. Prale was pounding the table and hurling pyrotechnic language at Vernier. Doran had an arm around Wilmerding and was assuring him that everything was all right. Wilmerding continued to stare at Vernier, his mouth open.

"Jerome Steeks!" repeated Vernier.

"Liar!" yelled Doran.

"You can't get away with that stuff!" Prale was advancing toward Vernier with a chair swung above his head.

"Wait!" Vernier made a pacific gesture with both hands. Prale paused. "I'll tell you how I know this man is Jerome Steeks." Prale put down the chair. "Only an epicure, a gourmet such as Jerome Steeks, would have been shocked by my putting ice in Chambertin. Only a man who knows thoroughly how to eat and drink appreciates wines enough to understand that the bouquet of Chambertin would be destroyed, frozen up, by cold. Steeks knows that red wine should always be drunk at the temperature of the room. This, gentlemen, is Jerome Steeks, epicure—wanted in San Francisco for murder."

"How about it, Willy? What's the inside?" demanded Prale.

Steeks, lately Wilmerding, did not turn his head. He was looking forlornly at a growing purple stain on the table cloth. In his excitement of snapping on the handcuffs, Vernier had upset three glasses of wine.

"Say, Vernier," said the manacled man at last. "Will you do me one last and quite reasonable favor?"

"Sure," said Vernier, "if you'll do me one. Tell me how you kept your hair blond without bleaching agents."

Wilmerding-Steeks smiled faintly.

"It was always blond," he said. "When I started living by my wits I figured I'd probably have to hide out some day. So I dyed it black and kept it that way, knowing I could let it grow out blond when I wanted to. And now, will you do me that favor?"

"What is it?" asked Vernier.

"Pour me a glass of your Chambertin," came the reply, "without ice."

THE LIGHT AT THREE
O'CLOCK

By
MacKinlay Kantor

ABOVE the switchboard a little clock ticked nervously away.

There was a certain hesitation in its chatter, as if after each catch of minute cogs it was waiting for something to happen. As if the clock had advance information on something relentless and implacable, and much more portentous than the black water dripping outside.

Its little white hands registered 2:53. The clock was the only active mechanism, apparently, in all that room. Below it, the black surface of the switchboard dozed, unbroken by any gleam of bulbs. Soon, of course, the bulbs would gleam. A woman would need a doctor for her baby. A man

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would call up his mistress. A long distance call would come in from Milwaukee. People somewhere in the Allan Court would be leaving, even at this hour of the night, and even in this cold rain.

Unlike the clock, Shultz wasn't functioning. Mr. Shultz had fallen asleep, leaning back in his chair, the metal band of the head-'phone gleaming tightly across his slick black hair. Mr. Shultz was very young and romantic, and just at this moment he was dreaming of a certain ruddy waitress with slender ankles. . . . The job being what it was—night operator and office boy in a large Sheridan Road apartment hotel—Mr. Shultz did not receive any enormous stipend. But he could sleep—and dream.

Suddenly, one red circle exploded amid the waiting rows of flat bulbs. The buzzer sounded, long and insistently. . . . Still the operator slept, stubbornly refusing to turn away from the romance in his dream. *Guzzzzzzzzzz* said the buzzer. The sound grew louder in its insistency; the office seemed to be alive with it, and its exasperation was almost visible.

Eddie Shultz came back to the Allan Court with a frantic bound. He blinked, jerked forward, and pawed hurriedly at a switch. His foggy hand found a plug; rammed it in. The red circle winked into blackness.

"Office."

The board waited blankly. Above, the clock chattered and scurried on its ceaseless round.

"Office," said Mr. Shultz.

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No answer. Then—it might have been his imagination—there was the sound of a receiver going back on its hook. The red bulb glowed instantly. Very much annoyed, Eddie withdrew the plug, and cursed.

Then, with a quick tightening of his muscles, he bent forward and looked searchingly at the offending light and its accompanying hole. . . . He could hear his own breath, alarmingly close and alarmingly loud. And he could feel an uncomfortable and cool irritation all up and down the back of his neck.

"God!" he thought. "That was Twenty-two! At least, I guess—But probably it was Twenty. Yes, it musta been Twenty." He leaned back and sighed with relief.

Guzzzzzzz.

The little red bulb was gleaming again. And this time there was no mistaking the location. The typewritten numerals in the slot beneath were all too visible: 22.

It might readily be admitted that Eddie Shultz's hand was cold and shaking. Eddie Shultz himself gulped and strangled. But there was nothing else to do: there was that red glow, that waiting connection, and there was the sound of the buzzer.

With one mad lunge, he stuffed in the plug and tore open the switch. The bulb winked out, quickly. Shultz found his voice. He roared, "OFFICE!"

Through the head-'phone clamped against his ear came one sound—a slight sound, but one which

filled him with icy horror. It was the sound of some unseen person *swallowing*. Then the switch clicked, and the red glare of an uncompleted connection showed before his eyes.

He drew out the plug and rose slowly to his feet. His eyes were riveted on that calm row of electric bulbs. His dry lips shaped the whispered words. "Twenty-two. Great gosh a'mighty—Twenty-two . . ."

A moaning gust of wind swept around the corner past the basement window. The dark rain sprayed against it as if flung from some menacing hand. There wasn't any traffic out in the street, not even the welcome sound of one lone car. The neighborhood was dead. The whole world was black and wet and dead. And in Apartment Twenty-two——

Two fifty-eight was what the hands of the clock registered. He had spent a most uncomfortable five minutes. The job was lousy, anyway. Didn't get much money. And these calls——

Eddie sighed, and sat down very slowly. Had to stay, that was all. . . . Hell, he oughtn't to be so nervous. He'd quit drinking gin, that's what he'd do. Probably that was what ailed him. There wasn't any such thing as a ghost; any fool would know that. When people were dead, they were done for. Even on a black night in that great U-shaped building, with the oily rain sweeping down in sheets; with——

Guzzzzzzzzz.

He shrieked in his mind: "I won't look! By

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God, I don't have to look. It isn't so! That place is—" But his eyes twisted in their sockets, led by a hideous fascination. There, in the middle of the row, that same little flat lamp was registering its rosy gleam.

Eddie's lips were as white as his cheeks. He faltered; nerved himself with one final spurt. It wouldn't be hard. The switch was right there, and the plug. Open it. Stick it in. There! The light was gone. It was easy. It——

And that same ghastly whisper came to him, seeming nearer than before. Gargling, choking, like breath come back into the frozen throat of a corpse. He screamed madly: "Office! Answer—Office!" And the switch closed, and the light winked, and——

Eddie had had enough. He leaped up, ripping off the head-clamp and flinging it down. He plunged across the shadowy little office and opened the front door. The rain poured down at him in a black, blinding spray. He turned up the collar of his coat; faltered. No, no. He couldn't go out. Run around the corner and down through the court in that rain? No! It was too much. He didn't have the nerve, that was all. He didn't care who knew it.

His eyes were wide and staring as he groped his way back to the switchboard. Hurriedly he thrust a plug into the hole marked "4" and opened a switch. His fingers pushed painfully on the red lever. *Ring*. Again. *Ring*. This was too much for anybody in the world to bear alone.

Eddie lifted the head-'phone. A startled sleepy voice was saying: "Hello, there. Hello. Hello——"

"Mr. Edwards."

"Well?"

"This is Shultz——" He strangled for a moment.

"Well, what is it?"

And then the barriers were swept down in one fearful flood. "My God, Mr. Edwards, I'm quitting! I tell you I'm quitting! I don't want this job. It ain't right for me to go through this. Mr. Edwards, come down here right now, or I'll beat it and leave the board, and go home. No, I'm not crazy. Listen here: you come down. . . . It's Apartment Twenty-two! Something's up there. Three times it's rung in here, and each time it hangs up when I answer. But it sort of chokes and swallows first. . . . My God! It's the truth, I tell you! . . . Yes, I know there ain't any person up there. But—Yes, I know, Mr. Duncan's dead, too. But it was just about this time last night that he got killed. . . . Mr. Edwards— *That light's on again!*"

Hatless, his topcoat and trousers drawn loosely over pajamas, Matt Edwards stood in the office and scowled at the pale and twitching Shultz.

"Now, what's all this damn' hullabaloo about?"

"Nothing, Mr. Edwards, I mean— Well, the light. It keeps coming on. And *you know*——"

The manager, slim and debonair—in spite of his strange attire—went over to the switchboard and

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bent to examine the rows of bulbs. "It isn't on now."

"No, it stopped registering just before you came. But wait. It'll come on again."

"Who's this talking right now? Forty-five hooked up with outside? And Thirty-eight hooked up with Seven?" Quickly he opened first one switch, then the other. A man's voice saying calmly: "Well, heat a little water and give it to her in a teaspoon if she won't take her bottle—" And one woman saying vengefully: "—if you go out to any more poker games for a month, my dear sir! All right, stay there and lose—" Edwards made a wry face and clicked the switches.

He turned to Shultz. "Nothing there. You're—you're sure you weren't mistaken?"

"Guess I know one light from another," protested the operator.

Edwards frowned, tapping his white hand on the back of a chair. "Look here. The apartment was locked tightly, inside—every door and window—when we broke in there with the police last night. I mean, at three o'clock yesterday morning. Duncan's key was on the inside of the front door; we had to break it open. I had a new lock put on the door afterward, and I've got the *only* key in my pocket. The back door is bolted and has the safety chain on. How could anybody——"

"There may be something else," whispered Shultz. His face was white as a scaled fish.

"Ghosts? Bunk!"

"It registered, Mr. Edwards. The light was on. Four different times it came on and buzzed."

The silence was broken only by the splash of water outside—a hollow, lonely drip that somehow reminded one of water seeping out of an old burial vault. In spite of himself, the young manager strove desperately to keep from shuddering.

"We'll sit down here, and rest, and watch that board. I don't want to doubt your word, Shultz, but— If that light comes on again, and I see it with my own eyes, we'll go up to that apartment."

Shultz huddled in a settee by the inner door. His employer sat down in the chair by the switchboard, an unlighted cigarette between his lips. His brow creased painfully as he reviewed the events of the succeeding twenty-four hours, trying to arrive at some explanation.

Duncan, the tenant in Apartment Twenty-two, had lived at the Allan Court three years—a man of evident wealth and refinement, though something of a recluse. He belonged to no clubs, attended but few theaters, and drove an imported roadster. Few people ever called at his apartment; all his tastes seemed ordinary, not to say conventional. He was an ardent collector of old flasks and glassware, and was said to be an authority on early American glass. The management had permitted him, at his own expense, to install many cupboards and cabinets for the housing of his treasures. Tall, gray-haired and slender, he was the perfect picture of a sedate gentleman.

Some time before three o'clock on the previous

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morning, adjacent tenants had been aroused by a shot. The sound seemed to come from Mr. Duncan's apartment. The building was old, although remodeled and modernized, and the thick walls prevented voices in one apartment from being heard in another. . . . A few minutes later the woman in the flat above heard a large automobile drive down the alley.

The manager was notified. When repeated calls to Apartment Twenty-two failed to elicit any response, Edwards summoned the police. The door of the apartment was locked, with Duncan's key inside, and it was impossible to use a pass-key. The officers forced the door, and entered the rooms. There was, at first glance, no trace of Duncan. Though every closet and cubby-hole in the place was ransacked, the tenant could not be found.

Every window was solidly fastened. The lights were burning. The back door was locked, with its inner safety-chain in place. The unused kitchen (Duncan took his meals in restaurants) offered no clew. Only the parlor proved what had occurred. . . . There was a bullet hole in the wall, and Sergeant Sherris dug out a .45 caliber bullet. There were fresh bloodstains, in quantity, over the rugs—and one splotch of yellowish-white, sickening and unmistakable.

So Duncan was dead—he had been murdered. But where was his body? And what was the motive? The rich stores of Stiegel glass and curios were untouched; there were diamond studs and platinum cuff-links on the dresser in the bedroom.

A terrified janitor came hammering at the door. He had been attending to boiler fires in the building next door, and his attention was drawn to some minor disturbance in the alley outside. He came out to find several men hoisting the inert body of another man into a big sedan.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Sick man," said one of them ominously. "Get back inside that door, and get back quick!"

He had fled, and they had driven away. No, he hadn't seen the license number—he was too frightened. No, he didn't know how many men there were—maybe three or four. . . .

So Duncan had been murdered, and his body taken away in that unidentified car. But how did the murderers leave the apartment? Every door and every window locked inside.

Sergeant Sherris nodded and looked wise. Every so often, for several years, some prominent or wealthy man had been kidnaped. Sometimes they got back alive—blindfolded and unable to relate any clues. Sometimes they didn't come back at all; the money hadn't been sent as directed. There had been Page, the hair tonic king. And Rosenbaum, the hotel man. And Justessen, that rich Dane visiting at the Drake Hotel. All kidnaped by extortionists. . . . It was possible that the same gang had come after Duncan. He had resisted. He had been shot. They had taken his body out of the apartment. But—how? And—why?

Edwards twisted uncomfortably in his chair. No denying it—that was where the spooks came in

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. . . at least, a mystery. And now, this strange call, this lighting of Apartment Twenty-two's switchboard lamp, when nobody was in the place—when he had the only key to the new lock——

Guzzzzzzz.

"Look there!" cried Shultz. "See it? *The light's on!*"

The rain tore clammily at them while they hurried down the court, as if unseen hands, ghastly and intent, were bent on holding them back from those dark rooms. Edwards lifted his eyes as they passed the last concrete flower-bed: the windows of Twenty-two were blank and ominous. . . . He didn't want to go. No. Of course, there weren't any ghosts. But in that room—that stained rug where the blood had soaked, and that other place—His senses were screaming at him: *Stop, stop! Go back before it's too late——*

"Come on," he said brusquely, as Shultz halted irresolutely at the vestibule door.

The night operator turned a greenish face to him. "By God, Mr. Edwards, I don't want to go."

"No more do I," growled the manager. "But we're both going."

Their steps shuddered softly on the carpeted stairway. It was impossible to believe that the opposite door of that first landing opened on an ordinary apartment occupied by ordinary people—a man, his wife, their daughters. Apartment Twenty-one. There were human beings, there. But across the hall, in Twenty-two——

Edwards fumbled in his pocket for the key. That new lock gleamed hideously on the damaged door.

Shultz whispered icily, "You got a—a—gun?"

"No, I haven't." And Edwards had a spinning, helpless sensation. "But, listen here. There's nothing to hurt us. Nothing——"

The door whined as it turned on its hinges.

Edwards felt along the wall for the light switch. The pressure of his finger flooded the hall with yellow light. As if twisted in their sockets by an invincible suction, the eyes of both men turned toward the telephone stand. And there was no one beside it, or anywhere else within sight.

The telephone stand was of the cabinet type, narrow and high; carved walnut. A small stool had been placed beside it. One door of the cabinet swung partly ajar.

Slowly, Edwards walked toward the 'phone; it seemed as if years passed before he reached it, and looked inside, and saw the instrument reposing in the shadows. He lifted the bracket; the connection clicked; yes, the 'phone was in working order. But no one——

"Nobody here," said Shultz. He stood close behind; Edwards could feel his nervous breath.

"We'll turn on the lights," the manager said. They advanced into the living-room, the dining-room, the bedrooms. Fearfully, they peered under the beds and opened closet doors. Nothing.

In the kitchen they stared at the outer door, locked and bolted, its heavy safety-chain snugly in

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place. Nobody there. Nobody in the pantry. A vacant apartment—a ghoulish, threatening place—with locked windows, locked doors, and still the thought of something inside.

Once more they toured the rooms, turning on the lights with prodigal haste. The dining-room and one bedroom had been refurnished by Duncan to act as galleries for his rare collections. Electricity gleamed softly on rows of dark flasks, blown glass, vases. There were tall cupboards along the walls, each containing its fund of glistening treasure. Nothing had been disturbed. Only that ragged hole in the plaster, and the dark stains on the rugs, told what had happened there. . . . The police had told Edwards to leave everything just as it was. They wanted to “investigate further.” All right; let them investigate. See if they could find anything.

Edwards and Shultz made a last examination. They poked beneath the davenport, peered into the hamper in the bathroom. No trace. No tracks. No marks of any human being.

As they retreated into the hallway, the manager once more opened the 'phone cabinet and lifted the instrument. No, his ears had not deceived him. He could hear that *click*. The 'phone was in working order.

“We haven't found anything,” he said to Shultz. He tried to laugh. The sound was eerie and startling in those deserted rooms. “I'm afraid it was just—just something the matter with the switch-board. We might as well go.” He reached into his

pocket for the key, and brought it out—a shining fragment of metal.

“Mr. Edwards!” The voice of Shultz was deadened with a cold, listless horror. “Look at your hand! You’ve got blood—all over your hand!”

For a full twenty seconds Edwards stared down at those tell-tale marks on his right hand. It seemed to him that he could hear his own heart, thundering in that oppressive silence all about. . . . Outside, the rain came down, blackly, dripping, dripping on damp ledges.

Then Edwards straightened. There was a tense, quick tightening of his mouth.

“Turn off the rest of those lights,” he said. His voice was unnecessarily loud, perhaps from fear. . . . He waited in the open door, wiping his hand on a handkerchief. Shultz leaped back out of the parlor, his lips trembling. “Let’s get out of here,” said Edwards, “for good.”

At the doorway, one finger on the light switch, he motioned for the operator to go ahead of him. Then, with a lightning gesture, he had pressed the key into Shultz’s hand.

His voice was a hard whisper:

“There’s something here. I’m going to stay. You turn out that light and slam the door; I’ll hide here in the corner. If the light shows on the board again, you call the police and come up here, and come in! I don’t know where It’s hidden; I don’t even know what It is. But that blood on my hand

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came off the telephone! Something's here. Now, beat it!"

The electric switch snapped out the one remaining light. Darkness. With a thud, the door slammed shut. Quietly, Edwards tiptoed across the hall and slid into a corner opposite the telephone cabinet. He crouched there in the gibbering darkness, choking his breath down, waiting, waiting.

The minutes passed like heavy bats, circling low, unwilling to alight.

It seemed an hour before Edwards heard the downstairs door shut, and knew that Shultz was in the court, hurrying toward the office. The constant fury of rain was somewhat abated; the water still came down outside, but in an intermittent dribble. Far away, the siren of a fire truck screeched with horrid earnestness, but in the apartment there was a bated silence as if unguessed monsters were only biding their time—waiting to spring out.

He was crouched in the further corner of the hall, opposite the outside door, between the opening into the bedroom and the wider doorway which gave on the living-room. No person—no Thing—could come from any direction without his seeing it. Lights from the alley and from the court shone in, faintly and bitterly, yet strong enough for Edwards to discern the bulk of furniture.

That telephone! The first time he picked it up, he had not placed his hand on the standard. The second time, he had done so. And immediately afterward, Shultz had cried out his awful

news. . . . The blood—the fresh wet stain—of something——

Far away, in one of the other rooms, there was a sound. It was unmistakable—the *creak* of wood, of an opening door. Edwards waited, swallowing fearfully. Something had moved! He was not alone!

Creak. Once more. Then, the tinkle of glass. A sound of footsteps, creeping slowly and heavily.

It was coming. It was moving nearer, out of the dining-room into the living-room. Its body thudded softly against some piece of furniture: there was a horrid sound, half human and half animal, a muffled cough and growl. . . . Edwards shrank closer against the wall. His fists were clenched tightly; the nails bit into his palms.

Nearer, nearer. It moved between him and the court window, a thin shape like a clothed skeleton. Yes, it was coming to the telephone again. It couldn't stay away. It must call, call on the telephone! . . . It was in the doorway now, black and gruesome, an arm's length away. Edwards heard that same choking sound, and a spasm of strained breathing. The door of the telephone cabinet banged open. That faint click and sputter—the lifting bracket——

Edwards plunged forward. His clawing hands encountered flesh, damp and clammy. He was grappling with the Thing—he had it in his arms. With a thud, the 'phone was on the floor.

But this creature, ghost or murderer, made no sound—no resistance. Quite suddenly and hide-

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ously, it had collapsed against him there in the close blackness. He struggled out into the living-room, dragging his terrible burden. And the light from the court shone in on its face—the white skin and staring eyes of Duncan, the man who had been murdered.

With a scream, Edwards leaped back. There was the heavy thud of a falling body. The manager felt his own hands raking the wall for a switch. And then, mercifully enough, his fingers encountered metal. He squeezed down. The room was flooded with light.

Duncan lay before him on the floor, clad in pajamas. Stained towels, ghastly and encrusted, were wound around his neck.

"Duncan!" cried Edwards. "It's—Are you dead? Are you——"

Trembling, he dropped down and lifted the shape in his arms. Duncan's eyes were staring, his lips moved soundlessly. He was alive—he seemed conscious.

"What was it?" Edwards gasped. "What happened? Where were you?"

The head of the injured man moved slowly. His eyes seemed seeking beyond the hotel manager, beseeching some object. The other man turned. On the table behind him lay a small bronze-covered notebook and ornate pencil. He seized them and lifted Duncan to the couch, pressing the book and pencil into his hands. On a side table was a decanter of whisky. He forced a few drops between the man's blue lips.

"Write it," he said. "Write it, if you can. You're going to——"

Falteringly, the pencil slid over the notebook in a weak scrawl:

They came in back way as always. LeCron got arguing about his split. We had trouble. Baletto cut me with knife but I shot him. They took him away in car and I was afraid

Edwards tore off the sheet of paper. The pencil still moved, its words barely legible:

police would come hearing shot I knew so I hid in my place. Lost much blood and to-night thought I would give up and send for police and doctor. Tried phone but could not talk and lost my nerve. When you came I hid again. Thought I might get out alive and get away but it started bleed again and I came out to phone again

The pencil wavered and dropped from his stiffening fingers. His head lolled back; jerked; there was a choking sob. His eyes stared glassily upward.

Outside, feet trampled in the hall. Men pressed against the door, noisily, fiercely.

"What I don't see," said Shultz, "is where he was hid."

The sergeant straightened up. "We can find that

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out in a minute. Wonder he lived as long as he did; his throat was almost cut in two."

"If you want to look now," Edwards said, "I think we can find it, and get to the bottom of this thing. When he came out, I heard glass tinkling."

They covered the body with a scarf, and Edwards led the way into the refurnished dining-room, Shultz and the officers pressing close behind him.

The manager bent down and inspected the cabinets of glassware with great care. On the bottom shelf of the last cabinet, he found an irregular red circle. "This must be it."

It took them some time to ascertain the combination. At length Edwards fumbled with one old flask which seemed cemented on the shelf. Glassware and all, the big bureau began to turn slowly in its place, disclosing a narrow closet behind the shelves. In the compartment behind were a few cushions, an automatic pistol, a big brief-case stuffed with papers, and the traces which showed all too well how Duncan had weakened and suffered during the hours he lay in hiding.

The red-faced detective sergeant needed only a few minutes' perusal of the papers in the brief-case to tell him what he wanted to know. "I was partly right and partly wrong," he admitted. "Looks as if he had made that cubbyhole when he installed the cabinets, figuring he would need a hide-away for this stuff, and maybe for himself. We can get the rest of the gang from the names he wrote in that notebook, Mr. Edwards. But I was wrong on this:

here I thought he had been murdered by that kidnaping gang which has raised so much hell for three years, and all the time he was the brains of the mob. Look at these papers and clippings."

Shultz heaved a vast sigh, and turned to his employer. "Just the same, I think I'll quit my job, Mr. Edwards. I'd go nuts if I was on the board to-night and another call came in from Apartment Twenty-two."

DRAWING ROOM B

By

Allan Vaughan Elston

MINTURN, lurking within Drawing Room B, heard the steps in the main Pullman aisle without and then a sharp rapping at his door. His expression was haggard, hopeless, helpless. He had gone over every possibility of escape.

Jump from the window, with the train pounding along at a mile a minute? Instant death! He might as well submit and be hanged for the murder of Norton.

Stand with his feet on the window sill and try clambering to the car roof from the outside? A human fly might do it, but Minturn knew he could

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not do it himself. Besides, they would look on the car roofs.

Fight his way out with a gun? How could he, with every vestibule locked, with the train crew warned, armed, and all this while scouring the train for him?

He was cornered. He was trapped like a rat. Here he stood, red handed, in Drawing Room B. And in the drawing room's tiny, private lavatory was the dead body of Gilbert Norton, propped up-right, a knife still spiked in the breast.

And now came a rapping at the door.

"Who is it?" gasped Minturn. Such was his perturbation that his voice was not at all like his own. His thought was, "It's all over; I might as well give myself up."

"It's the conductor," came the response from without. "Don't worry, Mr. Norton. I'm not going to let that fellow get at you. Let me in, please. I want you to give me a better line on him."

A chance in a thousand! It flashed over Minturn, and he snatched at it as a drowning man snatches at a straw. This train conductor had never seen either Norton or Minturn. He obviously thought Norton was in here now, alone and alive. One slim chance in a thousand there was, and Minturn snatched at it frantically.

There was a garment, a silk smoking jacket with up and down yellow stripes, lying on the seat. Also there was a gray traveling cap. Both were undoubtedly Norton's. Minturn put them on. They

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in no manner effected a disguise. They merely made the wearer seem at ease and at home.

With his fingers trembling and as cold as ice, Minturn now unlocked the door. He opened it to the half arc. A burly, uniformed conductor stepped in. Had it been the Pullman conductor instead of the train conductor, Minturn's false position would have been exposed instantly. For the Pullman conductor knew by sight both Gilbert Norton and Gilbert Norton's wife, had taken stewardship of their tickets two division points back, had in fact acted as a buffer between the Nortons, honeymooners, and the intrusions of successive train conductors.

The train conductor having now stepped inside of Drawing Room B, Minturn hastily relocked the door. He was still haggard, frightened, trembling.

But it was in exactly such a state that the conductor would have found Gilbert Norton, had he not arrived ten minutes too late. The conductor expected to find one live man in this drawing room, lounging in a smoking jacket, and such a man he found. It was the most natural error in the world for him to classify Minturn as Norton.

The conductor, mopping the sweat from his broad, florid brow, sat down. Minturn seated himself opposite. This, be it understood, was a standard drawing room; that is, there was a narrow aisle, on the window side of which there was a standard Pullman section. Across the aisle was a plush covered bench. In a corner there was a narrow, interior door, giving to the private lavatory,

an annex about three feet square which now concealed the upright body of Gilbert Norton.

"I'm Conductor Jim Bromley," began the conductor. His manner was deferential, as any skipper's is likely to be when intruding upon the private quarters of a *de luxe* passenger. "Your wife found me in the diner, Mr. Norton," went on Bromley, "where I was taking a bite of supper with the Pullman conductor. She told me there's a man on the train gunning for you, and I've taken steps to see that he don't get in here. I got my brakeman, Bill Dukes, on guard. Bill's hard boiled and he's heeled with a gun. I got him sitting with your wife in a section about the middle of this Pullman. If the man she's afraid of comes in, she's to pinch Bill's arm. We can then trust Bill to do his stuff. How does that strategy of defense strike you, Mr. Norton?"

Minturn bit down hard on his bloodless underlip. He was thinking under the whip of frantic desperation. He knew that his only chance of maintaining the illusion was to prevent Norton's wife from coming in. If she did she'd cry out, "Why, this is not my husband!" and the conductor would then punch him, Minturn, a quick, through ticket for the scaffold.

Therefore Minturn chose not to minimize the peril of attack by a passenger known and feared by the bride of the late Gilbert Norton, unknown and mysterious to Conductor Bromley, and who was really Minturn himself. Rather he chose to ap-

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plaud without stint the precautions taken by the train crew.

"If that fellow gets anywhere close to me he'll start shooting," said Minturn tensely, nor did he need to fake his utter funk. "If he starts shooting, I don't want my wife jammed in here with me in close quarters. He has nothing against her. He never saw her before to-day. She's safe, except for getting in the way of a stray bullet. Please don't let her come in here, Conductor, until you've got that man in custody."

"I won't," assured Bromley forcefully. "Now I don't want to horn in on your private business, Mr. Norton, but at the same time I want as good a lowdown as I can get on this whole affair. On a minor count, that fellow's beating a ride on my train. He's offered no ticket, nor announced himself to any trainman. He's a stowaway, hiding somewhere on this train. Hanged if I can understand it, either. I've just been through all the eleven coaches, with your wife in tow to identify him, and he can't be found."

"Maybe," suggested Minturn hoarsely, "he jumped off the train."

"If he did he broke his neck. He got on at Macksville, and we've hit fifty mile an hour ever since."

"It's a wonder," again suggested Minturn, "that you don't begin to doubt that he really boarded the train."

Minturn's choice of words was, perforce, strainedly cautious. Every time he used the pro-

noun "*he*" he had to think the pronoun "*I*." His heart was pounding like a trip hammer. It was a ponderous tragedy of farce, this act wherein Bromley thought he was talking to Norton, thought he was safeguarding Norton, whereas actually Norton stood propped upright, hideously dead, in a closet of this same compartment.

"Frankly, I did doubt it," admitted Bromley, "after the first futile search through the train. Pullman Conductor Joe Seeley still doubts it; he's lost interest in the search and is back in one of his other Pullmans. Seeley points out that your wife is nervously excited and merely imagines that a menace exists. Seeley saw all that rice throwing back at Columbus, Mr. Norton, and knows that you were only married this morning. He claims that the little lady is upset and having a brainstorm. But I myself, after sifting the evidence, known darn' well it's not a brainstorm; I'm convinced that there really is a stowaway aboard, stalking you, seeking your life."

"There is, for a fact," agreed Minturn, his dominant motive now being to prevent Norton's bride from reappearing in Drawing Room B.

"To clear our minds," went on Bromley, "let's rehash the account brought to me by your wife. It's now 7:00 P.M. An hour ago the train stopped at Macksville, changing engines and crews. That's where I got on myself. You and your wife were seated here, looking from your windows at the platform crowd. Your wife felt your hand grip hers tensely; she saw you turn pale; you were

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staring at a man on the platform; you were, she is sure, badly frightened. She followed your eyes and saw their objective, a man out there staring back at you, hatefully she says, striding toward your window as though for purpose of assault."

"That's right," confirmed Minturn. "I was scared. When I saw him coming, I slammed my window shut."

"Your wife," went on Bromley, "asked you about it, but you were reticent. At that same instant the train began to roll slowly out of the station. Your wife leaned from her own window and looked back. She was just in time to see the man leap to the brass railing of the observation platform, as it would have passed him, and climb aboard. He had no traveling bag; therefore his boarding must have been spurred by a sudden impulse. Your wife describes him as clean shaven, about your own age, Mr. Norton, and says that he wore a straw hat and carried a cane. Do you check that?"

"Ye-es," agreed Minturn carefully. "But remember that I myself did not see him hop the back end of the train. I'd slammed my own window shut. It was my wife who leaned from hers and saw him board us."

"Now here's what seems to have happened," went on Bromley. "As we were pulling out of Macksville, they were serving supper in the diner. The diner is the first coach ahead of the observation. The observation itself is a half Pullman, half parlor. The rear or parlor end was deserted then,

its recent occupants having gone forward to supper. Thus it is probable that no one saw our man make his informal entry from the rear. But in that parlor we now find a straw hat and cane which no one will claim."

Minturn nodded. He knew quite well that he had left his hat and cane in the deserted parlor car.

"Then," resumed Conductor Bromley, tapping five fingers against five thoughtfully, "this fellow came on forward through the train. Hatless and without bag, he did not appear like a passenger who had just boarded. He was looking for you, Mr. Norton. He didn't know which Pullman you were on. As yet he had no plan of attack.

"Coming forward, he arrives at the rear entrance of the diner. Tables for four were on the right of an aisle, and tables for two were on the left. Pullman Conductor Joe Seeley was seated at the next to the rear table for two. You understand, Mr. Norton, that I'm piecing out this theory mainly from information brought me by your wife."

"I understand," acknowledged Minturn.

"Seeley's back," went on Bromley, "was to the rear of the diner. The two chair table just behind him was vacant. Our man seated himself at that table, back to back with Seeley. Possibly he did so to avoid passing Seeley in the aisle and being accosted for a ticket. Or possibly he merely wanted time to think out his program of attack. Anyway he

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sat down. A waiter came and took his order. In the meantime you and your wife were here in Drawing Room B, two Pullmans ahead of the diner. You were frightened, and your fright increased when your wife told you she'd seen the man hop the rear end."

"Naturally she thinks I'm a chump and a coward," murmured Minturn, his chin dropped ashamedly, never for an instant forsaking the character of Norton.

"She admits she was piqued because you wouldn't confide in her," went on Bromley. "Just then you both heard a voice in the main aisle, calling, 'Supper now being served in the dining car'. You, Mr. Norton, should normally have been hungry. Mrs. Norton says that neither of you had eaten since the wedding breakfast at nine this morning. Imagine her surprise, then, when you said you didn't feel like eating and urged her to go alone back to the diner!"

These details were all new to Minturn. He absorbed them carefully, however, for the benefit of his part. He could understand what a chump Norton must have appeared to his wife. Norton, a bridegroom, declining to eat the first supper of married life with his bride! No wonder she was piqued.

"She knew," went on Bromley, "that it was because you were afraid of the man who had boarded the train. It put you, if you'll pardon me, in a poor light. She took you at your word and went back alone to the diner. As soon as she was out, she

heard the click of the latch as you locked yourself in, here in Drawing Room B."

"I expected that fellow to come in any minute and start shooting," asserted Minturn.

"Your wife," resumed Bromley, "reached the diner, where the steward ushered her to the only vacant seat, if we neglect the seat opposite Pullman Conductor Joe Seeley. She found herself at a table opposite the mysterious passenger. An ironic situation, wasn't it, Mr. Norton?"

Minturn bit down hard on his under lip and then admitted that it was.

"She was startled," went on Bromley, "but she had no fair motive to make an outcry. All she knew of this fellow was that a glimpse of him had terrified you, her husband. The man, in his turn, must have recognized her as the woman he had seen beside you at adjacent windows.

"What happened? Nothing, except that these ill-mated diners received their orders and ate in silence, furtively appraising each other.

"About that time I entered the diner from in front. I'd made the day coaches and was looking for the Pullman conductor. I saw him eating supper, and came up, greeting him, asking, 'Did you take on any Pullman passengers at Macksville, Joe?'

"He said, 'Not a one, Jim.' That simplified my immediate duties, as this train only stops at division points. There couldn't possibly be any sleeping car passenger whose ticket hadn't been punched

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by my predecessor. Joe Seeley's steak looked good, and I was hungry, so I sat down opposite him."

"Why," exclaimed Minturn, "then you must have seen this fellow you're looking for, eating at the next table with Mrs. Norton."

"I was vaguely aware of a well dressed couple there," admitted Bromley rather sheepishly, "but the man's back was to me. I merely assumed that they were man and wife. Besides, I was busy. While waiting for my steak, Seeley and I went through our customary ritual of teamwork. He showed me certain railroad tickets in his custody, of cross-continent passengers, giving me berth and drawing room numbers. These tickets included your own, Mr. Norton. But for this mixup, I probably wouldn't have seen you during my entire run."

"I understand," said Minturn.

And he did understand this part of it, for while seated in the diner, he had turned his head and observed the two conductors sorting through envelopes at the table back of him.

"Your wife," went on Bromley, "finished her supper hurriedly and came forward to rejoin you here in Drawing Room B. By then she was probably a little ashamed of her pique. On the way here, she looked back and saw that her recent table companion was following her. Alarmed, she increased her pace. She fairly ran the rest of the way here. She knocked frantically on this door. You, Mr. Norton, hearing her voice calling you, opened the door and admitted her."

"Yes," agreed Minturn, hastily taking up the account so that he might seem properly cognizant of it, "and I just barely got her in in time to slam the door in the face of that man. We both saw him come racing around the corner of the bend aisle. I got the door locked, though, just in time. He banged on it, calling through to me, 'Let me in, Norton! I've been five years hunting you down; let me in.'"

"'Who is he?' my wife asked me. 'Never mind who he is,' I told her, 'but if he gets in here he'll start shooting; that's what he'll do, he'll start shooting.'"

"Quick as a flash, my wife pressed a bell button, ringing for the porter. That must have scared the man away, for when the porter arrived there was no one around."

Minturn paused; he could not recount any more of the dialogue between the Nortons because that was all he knew. He had naturally retreated at the ringing of the bell. Fortunately, Conductor Bromley took up the account as he had gotten it from Mrs. Norton.

"Your wife," he stated, "insisted on reporting to the conductor. You were afraid to desert the refuge of this drawing room, so she offered to find me herself. She, in fact, knew I was eating supper in the diner. She left you and heard you lock the door after her. Coming back to the diner, she made a full report to Seeley and myself. We summoned the steward, as well as the waiter who had served supper to your wife. Both of these re-

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called the man who had eaten opposite her, mainly because he had left the table without calling for his check, leaving a bill on his plate. Their descriptions of him were, as descriptions usually are, bafflingly general. They both said, however, that they would know the man if they saw him again. That gave me three identifiers, your wife, the steward and the waiter. Seeley and I led them from end to end of the train, scanning the face of each passenger. All three gave each passenger a clean bill. Where does that leave me, Mr. Norton?"

"It leaves you up in the air, like I am," answered Minturn.

"It sure does. Why, we've poked into every nook on the train. Bill Dukes, my brakeman, has even stood on the back railing and looked down the roofs. It's hardly a wonder that Pullman Conductor Joe Seeley has given up in disgust, thinking it a hoax or a dream. What prevents me from agreeing with Seeley is this: the steward and the waiter admit that a man ate supper opposite your wife; yet they can't identify this man among all the exposed passengers of the train. There's only one conclusion; that man is on the train, *unexposed*."

Bromley puckered his broad, reddish brow and frowned out of the window into the deepening dusk. Then, jerkily, he switched on one of the lights, dissolving the gloom in Drawing Room B. It was not the main, or ceiling light, but the small berth light between the windows. Minturn shrank as far back from its glow as he could.

"Mr. Norton," said Bromley, "while your wife was back in the diner reporting to me, that fellow didn't knock on your door again, did he?"

"No," answered Minturn quickly.

A falsehood, of course, for here was Minturn now. Actually Minturn's intrusion had been absurdly simple. He had merely knocked; upon Norton's timid inquiry as to who knocked, Minturn had replied in a disguised voice, "The train conductor." And Norton, who knew the conductor had been sent for, had unlocked the door.

"Now, Mr. Norton," pursued Bromley, "can't you give me some definite detail of description which will help me run this man down?"

Minturn, put to the delicate task of describing himself, considered his reply cautiously. He decided to keep the generalities of the wife's description, yet at the same time strew a few herrings of confusion across the trail. He answered:

"I haven't seen this man, until to-day, for five years. He was then known as Henry Lord, but he may have changed his name a dozen times since. He's a blackmailer and something of a nut. Clean shaven, rather full in the face, blue-gray eyes and about my age. Medium height. Five years ago he had a mole on his chin. I'm sure of that. Yes, and he had one gold tooth, in the upper row. I'm sure of that, too."

"Fine," exulted Bromley, rising to his feet. "With that dope, I'll get him. Unless, him being something of a nut, he's been fool enough to jump off the train. If so he's back along the right of way

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with a broken neck. Sit tight, Mr. Norton. Dead or alive, his game's up. No crook can stow away on Jim Bromley's train."

"And in the meantime, you'll keep my wife out there safely under the protection of the brakeman?" pleaded Minturn, as he arose to unlock the door for Bromley.

"We will, not only for her protection but for her ability to identify the man if he shows up in the outer aisle." With that promise Bromley left the drawing room, whose door Minturn relocked with feverish haste.

Minturn was a rag of sweat. The long ordeal with Bromley had dragged him through a sieve of torturing suspense.

And to what end? What had he gained? Nothing but a miserable dole of time, a slightly extended respite in which to attempt the planning of an impossible escape.

The train was speeding inexorably on, at a speed of fifty miles an hour. It swung to the left on a sharp curve and Minturn, still standing with his hand on the latch, was thrown slightly forward against the narrow door of the lavatory.

He could have screamed then; for it seemed that the corpse of Norton was leaping out on him. Ghostly, glass eyed, clad in cap and striped jacket, Norton seemed to leap upon him like a vengeful ghoul. Minturn could have screamed, probably would have if he had not realized in time that the lavatory door was a full length mirror door; it had

been his own ghastly reflection leaping forward with the lurch of the train.

He went to the windows. It was pitch dark now. It was going on eight o'clock. Two hours to Graybull and the next stop.

Minturn knew that he could not possibly keep up the illusion that long. Bromley would quickly re-search the train; within a short time he would definitely establish that no passenger with a chin mole or a gold tooth was aboard. Little by little the conductor's brain would clear and the hoax would out.

Or, as the tension laxed, Gilbert Norton's wife would insist finally upon returning to her husband. Or the Pullman conductor would show up. Or the porter. Any of these eventualities would expose and doom Minturn.

He would be lucky, he realized, if he even had five minutes more to benefit by this skulking masquerade. His rope was short and getting shorter. He was in desperate strait, a strait from which he must miraculously escape or else hang for the murder of Gilbert Norton.

It was the infernal speed of the train which defeated flight by the window. If he could only halt the train——

That was it! If he could only connive some ruse of magic which would bring this mighty comet of rattling steel to a full and sudden stop. They were in a wooded wilderness, Minturn knew, and the night was dark. It would not be dangerous to drop from the window if the train were motion-

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less. Minturn might be a long way off in the woods before bloodhounds were started on his trail.

The man's excited brain concentrated frantically upon this vital issue—this single forlorn avenue of escape—stopping the train.

The solution, an amazing inspiration, burst suddenly like a bomb within his brain. It shocked him to the verge of stupefaction. He swayed there in the narrow aisle of Drawing Room B, feet wide apart to keep his dizzy balance as the train pounded on, as the rails clicked on in rhythm with his own racing heart.

But he saw the way. The sweat of his body fairly froze; he was chilled; he was dazed; but he saw the way, the ruse of magic by which he could stop this train in a hundred seconds of time.

He could not pull the emergency bell cord, for there was no such cord in the drawing room. There would be one, however, in the main aisle without. And Train Conductor Bromley could and would pull it, if——

If what? What, Minturn asked himself, are the circumstances of emergency under which a conductor will signal for the quickest possible stop? When and why will a captain stop the fastest ocean liner in mid-sea? Man overboard! There was the answer. Minturn would create the illusion of a man overboard, of a fugitive jumping out the window of a speeding train. To the fate of a broken neck, surely; nevertheless, by all human laws the skipper must stop the train. Train or ship,

an effort must be made to recover that body and carry it on to port.

One hundred seconds of time it would take; while the air brakes screeched and the train slackened from fifty to zero miles an hour. The greatest hazard of the interval would be, Minturn knew, the wife of Gilbert Norton. Five words from her—"Why, this is not my husband!"—and all would be lost. But would she utter them in these hundred seconds of time?

Would she not more likely collapse in a faint at sight of a man, gory, knifed, wearing gray cap and silk smoking jacket of yellow stripes stretched apparently dead or dying on the floor of Drawing Room B? Or, if she did not faint, would not she be too hysterical to render potent testimony during those vital two minutes? Better still, would not the burly forms of conductor and brakeman bar her immediate ingress to the drawing room?

Forlorn or feasible, Minturn seized it as his only straw of salvation.

He set to work. He opened a window to its widest width. There was no screen; had there been, Minturn would have punched it out. He then looked to the lighting. It suited him; the ceiling bulb was not lighted; the berth light was. The effect was a dim illumination, lighting the window area better than that of the floor.

Minturn now opened the door of the tiny lavatory. The body of Gilbert Norton toppled out into his arms. The knife was still spiked in Norton's breast. Minturn withdrew it. The withdrawal, as

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well as the jostling of the body, caused the blood to flow afresh.

This blood of Gilbert Norton smeared the silk and striped jacket worn by Minturn. Minturn wanted it thus smeared. His hands became sticky, red; he brushed them across the features of his own pallid face. Never did gluttoned fiend or monster appear more guilt stained than did Minturn now.

He dragged the corpse to the open window. He shoved the head and arms through opening, then paused to calculate the balance. The vital issue was that the conductor must seem to see with his own eyes the murderer dive head first from the window.

And so with ghoulish nicety Minturn balanced the corpse over the window sill by the hips. An inch more and it would have toppled out. The train was pounding on with terrific speed. Any lurch on to a curve to the left might lend a centrifugal pull which would spill the body out into the night.

Minturn, taking no chances of prematurely losing this dummy in death which was to impersonate his own flight, kept hold with his right hand to one of Norton's ankles. By stretching, Minturn could then reach forward with his left hand to the knob of his door.

Softly he turned the latch, unlocking the door. That he must do; for there should be, of course, no resistance to the inrush of conductor and brakeman. How that door got unlocked, and how Minturn had ever gotten in, would be puzzles too in-

tricate to be solved within the harried calculations of a hundred seconds of time.

Now, still holding to the ankle of the precariously balanced corpse, Minturn lay down in the aisle on his back. He laid the bloody knife across his own bloody chest. He threw the stained sleeve of his left arm across his own face. He made ready to hold his breath. For a hundred seconds of time death must seem to be life, and life death. The body of Norton must seem to be Minturn, and Minturn must seem to be the body of Norton.

The train lurched to the left. Minturn opened his lips and gave full cry:

"Help! Murder!"

He heard the bustling approach down the main aisle of the Pullman. Just as the door knob turned, Minturn released his hold from the ankle of the corpse, giving it a slight shove as he did so. And just as the florid face of Train Conductor James Bromley appeared in the open doorway, the body of Norton slid and slithered, legs last, into the night.

"Goshamighty!" bawled Bromley.

Shocked almost out of his boots, he still retained sufficient wit to reach up and jerk the emergency cord which signaled for the stopping of the train.

"I seen him," bawled Brakeman Bill Dukes, who was pressing close behind Bromley. "I seen him jump out o' the window."

"Oh, Gilbert!" shrieked Mrs. Gilbert Norton,

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bride of ten hours, who, pressing close and looking over the shoulders of the two trainmen, caught a glimpse of the victim who lay sprawled in the narrow aislet of Drawing Room B.

She did not faint. But she went into hysterics and stood there wringing her hands.

Hardly in any case could she have squeezed by at the instant, because Bromley filled the portal and bawled——

“Stand back, every one.”

A negro porter and three passengers were now adding to the congestion. All this while the air brakes were grinding, and the train was rapidly slowing to a halt.

“Bill,” bellowed Bromley, “when we stop, signal hoghead to back up half a mile. Get a detail of porters and pick up that nut murderer. You’ll find him with a broken neck. Load him on the baggage car, Bill.”

Bill withdrew. Bromley then came soberly forward and kneeled beside the prone figure in the drawing room aisle.

“Mr. Norton, are you—did he—?” Bromley flinched, sickened by the sticky feel of the victim’s chest, as Bromley groped for the heart.

He flinched again as his wrist touched a knife, and as this knife slid off the body to the floor.

Minturn held himself rigid, breath drawn, his eyes covered with the upflung arm. All the while those precious seconds of time were expending swiftly; the train was rocking to a halt.

“Thank God you’re alive!” breathed Bromley

huskily, just as Minturn could hold his breath no longer, and just as the train came to a full stop, its steel frame shivering mightily.

"He's still alive!"

Bromley turned to convey this gladsome message to the woman, who stood in the doorway sobbing and wringing her hands.

It was Minturn's chance. As Bromley turned from him, Minturn leaped to his feet.

He took Bromley completely by surprise. Hardly could Bromley have anticipated such a magic revival by a man just stabbed with a knife. He was too utterly dumbfounded to move a muscle, far too wit bound and muscle bound to reach forward and restrain Minturn.

While he gaped, Minturn dived head first from the window of Drawing Room B.

He lit, on wrists and knees, upon a sandy embankment, breaking a wrist bone, bruising his knees and sliding face downward into a borrow pit of shallow water. The night was inky dark. Came three blasts from the engine and the train began to back.

What now? Should he dash into the woods beyond the borrow pit, limping away in hopeless flight, to be pursued by bloodhounds just as soon as the trainmen could alarm a sheriff at the next town?

Minturn chose no such course of folly. He had fooled them twice; he would fool them again. Let them wonder why he left no tracks of exit

from the right of way. Let the bloodhounds sniff what spoor they would. He, Minturn, would do the one thing they would never expect him to do—he would ride away *on this same train*.

Scrambling to his feet, he climbed up the embankment in the path of his own sliding descent. The train was backing slowly. Minturn stooped beneath a coach, crawled upon the rods and lay there like an accomplished vagabond, while the train rolled on backward over the ties.

There was a creaking stop in half a mile. Voices. Lanterns. The brakeman's cry:

"Here he is, boss! Stone dead—stabbed—crushed! A helluva mess, boss!"

There was the business of identifying that body as Norton's. There was the further business of loading it on the baggage coach.

Then the train moved forward, slowly, slowly. In half a mile it stopped again.

More voices along the side of the train. Trainmen shouting to one another. Lanterns flickering. Minturn lay there quietly, on the rods, catching every sound.

"Make a note of the mile post, Bill," he heard Bromley yell.

"Got it," bawled Bill. "That geezer took to the woods in a hurry; you can betcher life he did. I got the mileage from this here culvert, boss. It's four eighty-two point six."

"Raytown's only six miles on," bellowed Bromley. "We'll stop and report, and they'll have a

posse here in an hour. Dogs, too. That guy ain't got a chance. All aboard!"

Toot-toot! The train moved on.

It was a week later that Minturn, at a Detroit hotel, was reading the latest news edition covering the sensation which had become advertised as the "Mystery in Drawing Room B." Through this last week, in his flight, he had kept accurately abreast of the hue and cry.

He felt reasonably safe. What worried him most was the distress of the bereaved young woman, the woman who had faced him across that small table in the dining car. He recalled the freshness of her, the innocence and the refinement of her features. He found himself strongly, though not strangely, drawn to her in a bond of sympathy.

These news accounts told more of her, not omitting the address of the parents with whom she had sought refuge in her grief. Minturn was sure that he owed her a certain comfort which was in his power to bestow. He therefore wrote and posted to her an anonymous letter, which read:

Do not grieve for Gilbert Norton. You are not his widow; you were never his wife.

He married my own sister five years ago and, after gaining control of her considerable fortune, he absconded with it on the very day her child was born.

I was vindictive. No court or jury would ever believe that I did not kill Gilbert Norton.

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Found as I was in there with his body, known as I was to be stalking him, no silver tongue of defensive eloquence could ever persuade my innocence.

Thus I shall never present my defense to any jury except yourself. You alone may believe me, for you alone saw the crimson, craven shame on Norton's face when I appeared on the station platform. Hark back to the testimony of his own guilty eyes, and then, dear lady, hear my own testimony of defense.

It is this: confronting Norton in Drawing Room B, I merely said, "So you've added bigamy to your other crimes, Norton!" Cornered like that, even a jackal will slash and bite—and thus did Norton. He came at me with a knife. I caught his wrist. We struggled. The train lurched into a sharp curve, dislodging his stance, hurling him against the wall—and against the point of his own knife.

That is the truth, so help me God! I have testified. And now your verdict? Guilty or not guilty? This hotel stationery and this postmark, Detroit, are clues. If you do not believe me, by all means turn this communication over to the police.

Minturn took no chances. Immediately on posting the letter he entrained for Denver. He watched the accounts closely, however, for many weeks, and as far as he could tell there was never any inquiry made for him in the city of Detroit.

THE MASTER OF THE
CONJURERS' GUILD

By
Joseph Szebenyei

AT 11:25 P.M. on that Saturday night in the press room of police headquarters in Vienna, we were playing cards as usual. By 11:30 each and every one of us had to report to the night editor over the phone, "Last call; nothing new." The forms closed at 11:40. If there happened to be some trifling item, we gave a hurried recital of the main facts, so that a few lines might appear about it in the morning issues. These were usually some minor suicide or some burglary somewhere in the city.

On that memorable Saturday night the police lieutenant, who was in charge of the press room and who handed us the releases, entered at 11:35,

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JOSEPH SZEBENYEI

just as we were about to close the card game and adjourn to a more lively locality over the Ronacher Orpheum. We looked at him inquiringly.

"Anything new?"

"Yes," he said. "Something quite unusual."

We gathered around him and listened to the most amazing story I have ever heard. He told it in a hurried, spasmodic manner in short sentences and watched our surprised faces as we looked aghast at one another and refused to believe it. We were a hard boiled lot of boys and men, some of us well advanced in years, veterans of the police press room, who were accustomed to weird things happening around us. Yet the unprecedented queerness of the story we were listening to took us by surprise. It sounded too mysterious to be accepted on the face of it in the matter-of-fact surroundings where any mysterious case was usually limited to some murder where the clues eluded the jovial detectives assigned to it. As a rule they were a sleepy crowd and would only wake up to the importance of some case when it happened to involve some member of the royal family or the government.

"It happened at the Imperial Opera House," he began. "The Archduchess Stephanie and her two escorts, Duke Branderdorff and Count Eszterhazy, the two court chamberlains, occupied the royal box. Just opposite their box there sat Baron Krondheim, the famous bank president, and the Baroness Krondheim. The baroness was wearing earrings with a single pearl in each. This was the

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first time she had had them on. The baron had brought them from India and it appears he had paid a million kronen for them. Unusually large and beautiful pearls. They were perfectly matched. Everybody gazed at them throughout the first act and people discussed them as sensational. Then during the intermission between the second and third acts, a royal lackey entered the baron's box and addressed the baroness:

"'Her Royal and Imperial Highness, the Archduchess Stephanie, would like to inspect the gems more closely. Would the Baroness be good enough to permit her to do so?'"

"Baroness Krondheim took one of the earrings from her ear and handed it to the lackey. That was the last they saw of the lackey and the pearl."

"How so? And the archduchess?" we asked.

"The archduchess knew nothing about it. She had sent no messenger. It was a fake lackey. He was attired in the royal household uniform. The baron swears that the man wore the uniform of the court servants. As the archduchess sat just opposite to them, and had previously smiled at the baroness and greeted her cordially, she had certainly no reason to doubt the genuineness of the request. The archduchess is very much upset over the affair, she being the favorite granddaughter of the old emperor . . ."

Of course it was plain, as plain as ABC. The emperor must have heard of it by now and must have sent word to the police to get the man. He feared nothing more than scandal or ridicule and

the case smelled of both. That a member of his family should be involved—even at a distance—in a scandal of this sort, was enough to awaken his ire. No wonder the police were on their toes and excited beyond measure. In fact, even as we listened to the story, we could not help hearing the commands in the corridors, the hurried and noisy departure of the reserves, the humming of the whole crowd within the tremendous building. Suddenly they had become alert and ambitious. Police cars were pulling up at the main entrance, the chief of police came hurriedly to take charge of the hunt, detectives were rushing out of the building in pairs and singly. Two thousand men were mobilized in a few minutes.

Baron Krondheim, the banker, was a shrewd, brainy man. The money the pearl represented meant nothing to him. He would have kept silent about the loss if he had had his choice. It was the silly simplicity of the plot that annoyed him. People would laugh at him, he surmised. He was supposed to be the brains of Austrian finance, the genius, who had attained his present position by cunning and by sheer brain power. And some petty thief had come along and made him look like a fool.

We rushed to see him, but he would say nothing. He sent word by his valet that the matter was in the hands of the police and that they would give us all the information there was to give. He had nothing to say. Anyhow, we had nearly forty-eight hours, for the story was too late for the

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Sunday papers, and on Mondays the dailies did not come out. Sunday was our day off. We retreated to the usual night haunt we frequented over the Ronacher Orpheum and discussed the case until four in the morning. Then we rang up the inspector of the day at headquarters. There was no development whatever. The men were out working on the case. Any clew? No, not that he was aware of.

It was noon on Sunday when we sauntered into the press room again. There were several releases on our desks, as usual. One dealt with the pearl case. It told all about it, and of the efforts the police were making to hunt down the thief. At one o'clock another release was distributed among the reporters. This is what it said:

Police Headquarters, Vienna Press Department

At 11:30 this morning a man attired in the uniform of a captain of the state police called upon Baron Krondheim, the banker, and representing to have been sent by the chief of the state police, requested the banker to let him have the mate of the pearl earring that was stolen the night before at the Opera House. He said the chief of police needed the second pearl in order to facilitate the search for the stolen one. As the man bore a written receipt with him, the banker let him have the pearl without suspecting anything. The chief of police stated that he

had not authorized any one to call for the pearl and that it is evident that the "captain of police" was the same person who by a clever trick succeeded in getting possession of the earring the night before. The investigation is being carried on.

"That takes the cake," said Baumgarten of the *Tageblatt*. "A master mind. A genius. He would deserve to get away with it. Imagine the impertinence of it. Going back for the pendant." He laughed uproariously and we all joined in.

"And he *will* get away with it. A fellow of his caliber can outwit the police of the whole world, let alone that of Vienna," remarked Gus Friedlander of the *Fremdenblatt*.

"Well, there is a reward of ten thousand kronen offered by the banker," the police lieutenant informed us. Upon the remark of Gus, that he would not buy it for a nickel, there was general and hearty laughter from the dozen reporters.

As the afternoon wore on and no progress was being made by the police, we found ourselves rooting for the thief. There was a pretty fair description of the man in the hands of the police. True, the "lackey" was described as six feet tall, while the "captain of police" who called for the pendant was given as five feet eight by the banker and the doorman at the mansion. But the description of the face tallied somewhat. Both had drawn, small, piercing eyes; both were described as having long-

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ish faces and hollow cheeks and both were estimated to be about fifty-five years of age. The police were convinced that it was the same person. A lone worker and a clever one.

It was to be a first page story and a long and fine one, too. We were all hard at work writing and collecting data, exchanging information, conferring with our cartel members, and hiding special information from other groups who belonged to other cartels. There was keen competition among the groups of three or four. Gus Friedlander was the star man in my group. Usually he directed the coöperative work. He came over to me and whispered:

"Go and see Master Gibbons at the Erzherzog Stephen Hotel. Tell him we want his theory on the subject."

I took my hat and walked out. Master Gibbons, in spite of his English sounding name, was a full blooded Austrian. He had been a vaudeville performer in his younger days and had adopted that name for stage purposes at the time. He still used it. He had left the stage some twenty years before, and devoted time to inventing tricks for the use of stage conjurers. He was known as the master of the conjurers' guild. He would invent some canny trick and sell it to a conjurer or a group of them in all parts of the world and live on the income for years, until he came forward again with some new one. It was he who invented the "levitation" trick, where a girl, lying on her back, rises in the empty air, seemingly unsupported, and

slowly drops back upon the floor. It was he who first made a box three by two feet, into which he would place a girl and then pierce the box full of sharp swords, fifty of them, from all angles, and the girl would still be in the box—unharmcd. It was he who invented the guillotine trick, beheading a person with a regular guillotine, the head visibly dropping from the body as the ax fell upon the victim, and the next moment one saw the conjurer replacing the head with no ill effects at all.

Most of the sensational and inexplicable conjurers' tricks were his inventions. He was a genius in solving problems and finding facts to deduce other facts from. We never failed to get his views on any major criminal case, and whatever he said was always interesting.

I found the master seated in the café of the hotel in company with a young detective. I had often seen the younger man at headquarters and immediately surmised that he, too, came to ask the advice of the master in the mysterious pearl case.

"May I join the conference?"

"Certainly, take a seat. What will you have?" asked Mr. Gibbons. "This is my nephew, George Gastein," he added.

"We have met before," I said, shaking hands with the detective. "Have you heard the latest, Master Gibbons?"

"George was just telling me about it. I was suggesting to him to go straight to Mr. Krondheim and tell him to return the pearls to his

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wife. It sounds like an insurance job. But George tells me that the pearls were not insured. I said, in that case, it is a family affair. The banker perhaps could not afford to spend a million kronen* for earrings, so he chose this way of getting them back from his wife."

"You don't want me to quote you on that?" I asked.

"No, of course not. I am just fooling. It's most likely, still, that that would be the first thing to suggest itself to me, if I were working on the case."

"There is certainly a great deal to it. It never occurred to me," said George.

"And it wouldn't occur to a good many others, either," said the old man with contempt in his voice. "They blow this case up into a tremendous criminal case. It's nothing of the kind. Just a clever thief. It's a bit of brain work, that's all. They have to go out and find the man. Just as in any other criminal case. They ought to have a description of him. Half a dozen people must have seen him in his two uniforms."

"Do you think he will try to leave town?" asked the detective.

"No, not with his brains. He'll just stay indoors for some time. He knows the trains and the stations are watched. He knows there is a description of him circulating all over the country. A man of his abilities stays indoors and waits. He knows that he couldn't sell the loot on this continent. He had his plans laid before he took the first step, if

* \$200,000

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I am any judge of men. I am afraid they will never get him. If it was the baron who engineered the thing through an accomplice, he will deny it and will know how to hide his man. How would you prove it on him? No way. And who would think of charging him with the crime? No one. Besides, how can you charge a man with stealing his own property? You can't."

"What for publication, Master Gibbons?" I asked.

"For publication? Just say that I think this man is a great fellow whoever he may be. That he worked with brains and mathematical calculation. That he ought to be invited to join the detective bureau of the state police. That a man of his abilities should have been employed by the state and not permitted to run amuck with all that genius directed against society instead of for the benefit of society. Imagine what that man could do in the way of harm, if he once got going."

I made notes of what the master said and left them. Back in the press room I gave the notes to Gus and my two other pals. When I casually mentioned that George Gastein was with the master, Gus told us in a whisper that George Gastein was not the master's nephew, as he liked to call him, but his son.

It was a queer story, characteristic of Master Gibbons. The old boys, who had known him in his youth, recalled that affair of his with a vaudeville dancer, who had committed suicide some twenty years before and who had been Gibbons's assistant

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on the stage at that time. It was then that Gibbons retired from the stage and began inventing tricks for the profession. George Gastein was the dancer's son and—it was surmised—that of Gibbons. It was never learned why she took her own life. She was beautiful, in fact the most beautiful girl in vaudeville in Europe. She carried off the beauty contest prizes among vaudeville people every year. She was celebrated, and they whispered at the time that she had wanted to leave the conjurer and branch out in an act of her own. She played second fiddle to Gibbons in his show and her success gave her a swelled head. But Gibbons would not hear of it. So she killed herself.

Of course, this was just talk. It might have been true or it might not. At any rate, those who were close to him knew that she had a son and Master Gibbons brought him up and paid for his education. They also knew that ever since the girl died, Master Gibbons was a changed man. He never had appeared on the stage since, he was never known to associate with any other woman and lived a secluded life, studying constantly and pondering over thrilling tricks that amazed the world and set audiences gasping.

Of George Gastein, the young detective, some people at headquarters knew that, up to the time he entered the service, he was a drifter and a good-for-nothing. He was educated and naturally intelligent and he inherited the beauty of his mother, but nothing of the brains and genius of his father.

He had tried his hand at various jobs, but was unsuccessful everywhere. It was Gibbons's influence with the higher-ups at the ministry of interior that landed him the job in the detective bureau. He had not been very successful there either. He was considered a mediocre man at detecting crime and was never given an important assignment. He was one of those fellows who would hold his position while his influence lasted or until a new régime came in place of the present one and swept him out with the rest of the none too necessary bunch. Only those were retained by a new régime in the police department who showed exceptional ability and who had performed some laudable and memorable act in the course of their service.

Detective Gastein had nothing to his credit during his two years' service at the bureau. Not even industry, or initiative. Captain Wanger, chief of detectives, whenever he met old Gibbons at the café, where he would drop in now and again to look over the newspapers, did not enthuse over the old fellow's protégé. He expected Gibbons's son to exhibit a greater quantity of deducing and reasoning quality than he showed. The chief had kept him on merely to please the old man, who often helped them out with advice in major criminal cases and who was respected and befriended by the high officials of the ministry.

The fact that Detective Gastein was in conference with Mr. Gibbons when I went to interview him brought out all this information from my colleagues when we met after the day's work was

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over early in the morning. We found it natural that the young detective should go to his father and get the benefit of his experience and specially fitted mentality in a case of such importance as the Krondheim pearl case proved to be. Gibbons would surely help his own kin first and we soon came to the conclusion that he was giving the young man advice that he would not give to any one else, certainly not the press.

We took it for granted that the suggestions he had dropped to me that afternoon were more misleading camouflage than anything else and that his real tip, if he did have one, went to his son. We also surmised that the son was badly in need of some distinguishing deed if he hoped to keep his job for any length of time. We had implicit faith in the genius of old Gibbons. We knew of a number of big cases where his suggestions had been taken and had been followed by prompt results. He had never worked on a case personally. We had never known him to go out and work on a case, even to take the slightest part. He just planned campaigns, drew innumerable plans on the marble tops of café tables and directed the operation of the bureau from the café in the Archduke Stephen Hotel.

This being the case, we decided that in order to beat the other cartels and all the rest of the newspapers, we would have to keep an eye on young Gastein and follow his activities in the case, for we felt sure that old Gibbons was straining his brains as he had never strained them before, in

order to get a break for his son. At least, that was the theory we adopted; and now it was up to us to find out whether it was sound or just a hunch.

They put me in charge of this phase of the operations—I being the youngest in the bunch of four. And the youngest fellow usually gets the toughest tasks and the toughest deals, as I have always experienced in my dealings with my colleagues around the press room. And I can't deny that the boy who later joined us and relieved me from my position as the youngest got no better deal from me than I had had from the older men in my time.

I got up at an unearthly hour the next morning. At nine o'clock I was already consuming my breakfast at the café in the Hotel Archduke Stephen. I wanted to see if the young detective would meet old Gibbons there before he started out for the day's work. Master Gibbons was there, but Gastein failed to turn up while I sat eating. Before I left the place I sauntered across to Gibbons.

"By the way," he said, "is there any break in that pearl case?"

"Not that I know," I replied.

"How does it look to you?" he inquired.

"The press room is rooting for the thief. A clever guy can always get our sympathy." I went on, "Unless, of course, it's a murder case. It's always good fun to watch a fellow get away with a couple of pearls so long as they belong to a millionaire banker."

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"Well, I wouldn't say that," the old fellow reflected. "Sure enough, if they fail to catch the thief, it will be an everlasting blemish on the name of our police."

"How is young Gastein doing in it?" I asked, turning the conversation in the direction of my greatest interest. "I hope you gave him some sound dope to start him on the job."

"Yes, I always do, whenever he needs my advice. He is young and ambitious and a little advice never hurts."

"Have you any theory as to the thief?"

"The case itself is such that it presents but one theory," he answered. "You see, the man and his work are both unusual and out of the ordinary. No habitual criminal of the usual type has brains enough and humor enough to conceive a piece of work such as this. You've got to search for the man somewhere where thinking is being done and where men with brains gather. You'll never find him in a gin mill, or a second class hotel, or in the cheap suburbs. The very simplicity of the work shows a disciplined mind and a calculating brain. Sometimes I think I could have been the only one in Vienna to perpetrate a job like this," he said with a smile and a proud gleam in his eyes.

"I don't know of any other man in this town who could have evolved the scheme—except myself. . . . True, the man must be superior to myself, inasmuch as he could not only plan it, but also carry it out. I would have proved myself inferior there. You see, I can plan and construct

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the most unusual things in my own profession, but when it comes to trying them out and putting them on, I have to get my colleagues to do it. I couldn't face an audience with any of my tricks any more. As a matter of fact, I never could. I was a second rate conjurer while I was active on the stage. Some people are clever with their hands, others with their brains."

He laughed a good natured laugh and looked at me with his half closed eyes as if to fathom my thoughts. I am sure he could have read them if he had cared to. I felt like a looking glass whenever I talked to the man, he was so uncannily wise and so terribly superior. I noticed that he was evading the subject, so I just persisted and returned to it.

"What angle is Gastein tackling?" I asked.

"Oh, you'd like to know, wouldn't you? You see, it would be unwise for him to disclose his hand, for the least little thing might upset the theory. You'll have to wait and see. He might be chasing a phantom, for all I know. There is one thing, however, I may tell you, and that is that he has a theory of his own and he is working on that and not on any of my hunches. True, he discussed it with me, and I gave him a couple of hints, but he is certainly working on his own initiative and testing his powers. I hope he succeeds," he added after a pause.

I left him sipping his coffee, audibly enough. A crafty old fox, Master Gibbons. And a boastful

one, at that. He could have been the only one in Vienna to put over a job like that. He was the only brainy and mathematical intellect in town. And though I disliked braggarts, I had to agree with him. Perhaps it was he. Who knew? He might have been saying that just to sidetrack any suspicion we might have had. Ah, nonsense. Nobody would dream of suspecting him, the friend of all the big men in town, the wizard who had spent twenty years of his life in respectability and was reputed to be a man of considerable means. Besides, everybody knew his face. He would have been recognized anywhere. My mind played with the fanciful idea merely because it would have been good story material and because I had dreamed of doing a scoop for my cartel one day that would establish my reputation as a reporter among the boys.

I waited at the opposite corner behind one of those advertising setups—broad, round wooden columns pasted over with posters—and watched the door of the café. I was waiting for Detective Gastein to turn up and then to follow him and get a line on his theory. Meanwhile, I was weaving fantastic dreams, trying to connect Old Man Gibbons with the theft. I had enough police experience to start at the bottom of every theory; to look for the motive. What motive could Gibbons have? He could not possibly sell the pearls. He could not risk getting caught red handed. He could not risk the reputation of a lifetime for a

few thousand crowns. There must have been some other motive. Perhaps he wanted to make a monkey of the chief of police.

I had to laugh at my own stupidity to be dwelling on a theory as preposterous as that. I would not have dared to hint at it to my colleagues, lest they should laugh me out of the press room. Really, I had no reason to suspect the old fellow at all. It was just the imagination of a youthful dreamer. And yet the hunch somehow persisted and I could not get my mind off the idea that the old man had played the trick in a prankish spirit or with some more sinister purpose. I could not fathom his motive. His own admission that he alone could have thought of a thing like that—though said as a joke—persisted to excite my imagination and I could not rid my mind of the suspicion that he had said that in order to carry his joke a step further and to enjoy my stupidity in accepting his words at their camouflaged value.

What made this hunch even more preposterous than it appeared was the fact that Old Man Gibbons was noted as a man of golden heart and endless charity. They said that he squandered fortunes every year by giving them away to people who were hard up, or helping strangers who happened to need succor. He was beloved by all and sundry and his half closed, smiling eyes always gleamed with sympathy and love for all. I hated myself for my hunch and was trying to dismiss my ugly thoughts when my meditations were interrupted

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suddenly. I saw Detective Gastein entering the café. Through the large window pane I could see him approach the table where Gibbons had sat just before and where he usually sat when reading the morning papers. But I could not make out whether the old man was still there or not.

I advanced a few steps so as to get the sun out of my eyes and to get a better view into the shady nooks of the café. Gastein was still standing, talking to a waiter. Gibbons was gone. Then I saw the detective emerge from the café and stand waiting, as if at a loss, in front of the terrace, looking about him furtively as if he were pondering where the old man had got to. He glanced toward the hotel entrance now and again, as if expecting some one from there. I remained behind the advertising post and watched.

A moment or two later I saw an officer dressed in the gala uniform of the hussars emerge briskly from the hotel. He had two golden stars on his collar, denoting the rank of a lieutenant-colonel. Tall, slim and stately, with a small beard and thick mustachios, pointed at the ends, he was typically Hungarian, with that walk of authority and no small bravado that characterized the Hungarian hussar officer throughout the realm. He carried a small brief case in his right hand, holding his sword under his left arm. The porter was busy getting a cab for him and I had time to study him with no end of admiration while the cab drew up hurriedly and the man entered.

The cab drove off and I turned my attention

again to Gastein. He looked after the departing cab for a moment, then darted toward the middle of the street where an empty cab was slowly cruising, opened the door while it was still in motion and I saw him point after the departing cab as if he had been instructing the driver to follow it.

With a flash it passed through my mind that the officer in the lieutenant-colonel's uniform must have been the thief. The fact that he was attired in another sort of uniform and one that commanded respect, after having used two other classes of uniforms already with success, indicated to my mind that Gastein was perhaps on the right track; and that it must have been the old man, with his deductive mind, who had tipped him off that the thief would have to be sought in a uniform of some sort. A lieutenant-colonel of the Hungarian hussars would not be subjected to suspicion. No police officer would dare to accost him, would dare to breathe a suspicion of the mildest sort accusing one of the caste. And this one was dressed in a gala uniform—perhaps on his way to the emperor for an audience. A clever thief of the kind we had to deal with would resort to a uniform that would insure immunity when making his escape.

All this passed through my mind while I was frantically searching for a taxi to follow the two. Luckily there was no traffic deserving of the name in Vienna at the time and the two minutes that passed between their departure and my finding a

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taxi did not make much of a difference. They were driving along the Great Ring toward the Opera House and the Royal Burg and I could still see them in the distance, about ten blocks away, when I got into my taxi and ordered the driver to catch up with them.

The first car stopped in front of the Royal Palace. The great iron gate was wide open and the lieutenant-colonel walked straight through it with the air of a man going home. The detective's car drew up behind the first one just as the officer entered the gate. I stopped my taxi on the other side of the broad circle and watched the drama enacted in front of the palace. It was short and to the point. The two sentinels in front of the palace saluted the officer by standing at attention and running their hands down the straps of their shouldered rifles and gazing after him with stiffened necks and bodies. Gastein jumped out of his car and rushed to the one the officer came in, shouting to the driver, who looked back expectantly, in the hope that another fare was about to engage him. Gastein opened the door of the first car and took the brief case the officer had left in the cab, then made a determined effort to run after him.

The two sentinels, however, barred him from entering. I could see him showing his badge, arguing with the soldiers, but they would not budge. They must have had orders not to permit civilians to enter. He blew a whistle and soon the uniformed man on the nearby post came trotting up. While he

waited for him, Gastein opened the brief case and drew from it a small white package. I could see him unwrap it and gaze at the contents with amazed eyes, fingering the small objects for a moment and slipping the package into his trousers pocket.

The two cabs were waiting in the meanwhile. Gastein took the serial number of the first one, then instructed the uniformed man to wait there; and he must have told him to arrest the lieutenant-colonel of hussars when he should return. Then he jumped into the cab, drove to the café, three or four blocks away, and rushed to the telephone. I followed and entered the adjoining booth to listen to what he had to report. I heard him say:

"Send a squad of men to surround the palace, Captain. He is in there. Why not? Hell, the emperor needn't know. There will be no scandal at all. No one will observe. I put a uniformed man at the gate, but he might escape through some other entrance. You must—I've got the pearls all right. Well, go and consult the chief. Hurry up, or he'll get away. . . ."

I watched the detective rush out of the place and enter the cab again. I thought I had seen enough. I was elated and happy. Good for Gastein! He had made good. His promotion was assured. I was torn between duty and admiration for the young man. Should I rush to the press room and tell my cartel members, or should I run to the Archduke Stephen Hotel and tell Old Man Gibbons first? It would be on my way anyhow. I

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drove back to the hotel and walked up two flights and knocked on the door at the apartment Gibbons occupied. I could not wait for the "come in" call. I just pushed the door in and entered. Old Gibbons was standing in front of the mirror, tearing off his false beard and mustachios, the tunic of the uniform lying on the chair and the trousers still on him. I must have stared at him with protruding eyes and stammered some apology as I was on the point of drawing back, when he turned. He had seen me enter in the looking glass. He said:

"Come in, old boy. Don't get so excited. Sit down. I'll be ready in a tick."

I closed the door and bolted it with an automatic movement. He noticed what I had done.

"That's right. You seem to have more sense than I have."

I was unable to utter a word. I sat down and watched him smear off the mucilage. He looked at me and smiled benevolently.

"You see, I saw you from the café hiding behind the advertising post. Then I saw you following Gastein in a cab. I didn't expect you to come up here. I thought you'd dash to the press room or to your paper."

"I wanted to tell you—" I stammered. "But what's the meaning of——"

"Well, you see, I am expecting to join my ancestors soon and I was afraid George Gastein would never make good in the department. I wanted to give him a lift before I cleared off.

I have nothing to leave him, so I just wanted to put him right with his job."

He paused and glanced in my direction to see how I took this confession. Then he resumed in an offhand way:

"I am sure your father would have done that much for you if circumstances had warranted it. You see, I tipped him off about the hussar officer who lived next door to me in this hotel. I hired the room a week ago in this uniform and my make-up. Gastein doesn't know. He is hunting for the officer now, I bet. I knew they would not let him follow me into the palace. He is so dumb, you can put anything over on him."

He had by this time resumed his original face, put the uniform away and put on his dressing gown, lighted a cigar and sat down opposite me in a big arm-chair.

"Thank God it's over. I suppose it will be a good story for your paper. I am sure they wouldn't prosecute me, considering that I let them have the pearls back. But George will lose his job."

I had a hard time repressing a tear that was trying to sneak out of my eye.

"No," I said, "he wouldn't lose his job on my account."

"I knew he wouldn't on your account," he said. "You see, you have to help the other guy, if he is weaker than yourself. He'll gain confidence now, and his pride in himself will urge him along. Now he'll make good. I'm sure."

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There are certain things one doesn't tell even one's cartel members. There are stories one doesn't care to write for some reason or other. This was one I waited fifteen years to write, and I am not sorry.

(continued from front flap)

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